

# HERBALISM & STATE VIOLENCE



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PRACTICAL HERBAL MEDICINE FOR SURVIVING STATE REPRESSION

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N I C O L E   R O S E





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Edited by Nicole Rose



Herbalism and State Violence, Edited by Nicole Rose

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# CONTENTS

Welcome & how this book is structured	11
Notes on herbal safety	18
<b>Part 1 - State Violence &amp; the Body</b>	
Herbalism & state violence	22
Trauma & the body	28
Herbalism & trauma recovery	37
Collective responses to trauma	47
Polyvagal theory, herbalism, resiliency & healing	52
Plant imagination	59
<b>Part 2 - State Repression</b>	
Introduction to state repression	65
Police raids & herbal allies for shock	72
Herbal support for panic attacks	78
Defendant support & long-term chronic stress	88
Herbal solidarity in practice: court support packs	97
Herbal solidarity in practice: solidarity sniffers	102
Remedies & recipes: brave heart blend	104
Remedies & recipes: heavy heart tea blend	106
Remedies & Recipes: soothing spiced lavender milk	107
I will wait for you in the forest	109
Nervine tonic for building the new world in the shell of the old	113
Nutritional resilience	115
Trauma, the gut and healing: building deep resiliency with herbs	119

### **Part 3 - Police Violence**

Introduction to police violence	132
Herbal mutual aid during police violence	135
An overview of herbal street medic resources	136
Street action care kit list	142
Key points on herbal first aid aftercare for all who have experienced police violence	145
- Herbs & protocols to detox from chemical weapons exposure	146
- Liver support	148
- Respiratory support	149
- Immunity support	152
- Remedies for bumps, bruises, burns, taser and handcuff injuries	153
- Nervous system support	156
Remedies & recipes: mugwort hydrosol as chemical weapon aftercare	160
Herbal solidarity in practice: herbal solidarity for frontline resistance, HS2	163
Herbal solidarity in practice: badger cull & hunt sab solidarity	166
Remedies & recipes: fire cider recipe	170
Herbal solidarity in practice: solidaritea	172
How to support an herbal call-to action	174

### **Part 4 - Prison**

Introduction to prison	178
Practising herbalism in prison	188
Trauma recovery and abolition: state violence, PTSD and healing justice	192
Healing from incarceration	195
Herbal support for nightmares	211

The relentless rollercoaster of prisoner support	218
Herbs for prison visits	223
Herbs for heartbreak & support after prison phone calls	231
Herbs for anger & rage	233
Herbal allies for grief	236
Remedies & recipes: sister heart compound for grief	245
Remedies & recipes: plant magic - crafting a ritual smoke incense	246
Trauma and the prison system - herbal allies for resilience & repression	248

## **Part 5 - Border Violence**

Introduction to border violence	254
Herbal solidarity in practice: The Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais	271
Organising a mobile clinic - top tips	280
Remedies & recipes: Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais recipes	298
- Calais cough syrup	298
- Chest rubs	300
- Immune tonic	302
- Antimicrobial vinegar	304
- Bruise ointments	306
- Mouthwash	307
- Wound sprays	308
- Anti-itch spray	309
- Indigestion lozenges	310
- Other herbal items used in the clinic	312
- Other first aid essentials	316
Herbal solidarity in practice: care packages for displaced women	319
Herbal solidarity in practice: solidarity for asylum seekers in Ireland	321



Remedies & recipes: solidarity soother	322
 <b>Part 6 - Genocide, Occupation &amp; War</b>	
Introduction - plant medicines in a war context	324
Herbal solidarity in practice: Ukraine Herbal Solidarity	333
Herbal solidarity in practice: lavender oil in solidarity with Palestine	347
Remedies & recipes: lavender oil	349
Contribution: herbal remedies rooted in ancestral Armenian practices	351
 <b>Part 7 - Plant Allies</b>	
Introduction	356
Betony	361
Chamomile	364
Hawthorn	368
Lavender	372
Lemon Balm	376
Milky Oats	380
Rose	383
Skullcap	387
St John's wort	391
Vervain	395
 <b>Conclusion - Plants as comrades against and beyond the state</b>	
 <b>Part 8 - Resources</b>	
Medicine making basics	404

Harvesting, drying & storage	418
Glossary	422
Acknowledgements	429
About Nicole Rose	430
About the Solidarity Apothecary	431
About Kes Otter Liefte	434
Index	435

**Legal Disclaimer** - The publisher and editor of this book do not intend to provide specific medical advice. The content of this book should be used as a source of information and not a basis of diagnosis or choice of treatment. All content contained in this book is provided for this purpose only and no part of this book is intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, care, diagnosis or treatment. Plants should be identified accurately before any consumption. The reader's use of the content, for whatever purpose, is at their own risk.

***For Taylor and everyone who has been  
killed by state violence***

*This book is dedicated to you.*

## WELCOME & HOW THIS BOOK IS STRUCTURED

Thanks so much for picking up a copy of the Herbalism and State Violence book and giving it your time and energy. I'm so grateful that you're here.

I want to share a bit about how it is structured. I invite people to jump ahead to sections that take their interest and not feel the need to read it in a linear way.

### **The book contains different kinds of content:**

**Introductions:** The start of each section aims to introduce that particular aspect of state violence, so we can understand the larger context of this form of organised oppression.

**Remedies and recipes:** These are recipes for different medicines, including ingredients lists of particular blends and why certain plants have been chosen, or detailed instructions on how to make medicine to a specific quantity.

**Herbal solidarity in practice:** These are examples of herbal solidarity in action, with descriptions of different projects around the world. Some projects have already ended, while others are ongoing. I've tried to include a variety of different projects for inspiration.

**General articles:** These are texts I've written on particular themes. Some are pulled from texts I've already written before, while the majority are new for this book.

**Contributions:** These are articles that people have contributed to the book from around the world. They are not edited, aside from the occasional spelling and grammar point. You can find a bit about each contributor at the end of their articles.

**Plant Allies:** These are plant profiles sharing more details about a number of herbs found in the book. All of them are nervines: herbs with an affinity for the nervous system which resurface over and over again in many of the sections.

**Resources:** I've shared a link to an online resources section to accompany the book. There are also medicine making guidelines for different kinds of plant medicines, as well as a glossary to help clarify any unusual terms.

### **About the different sections**

**Part One - State Violence and the Body:** This section introduces the

state and some of the many expressions of state violence around the world. I introduce how trauma affects the body and some of the ways the body expresses distress - from nightmares to muscle pain. We then look at the importance of collective care and solidarity in responding to traumatic stress. Finally, we begin to explore the roles of plant medicines in supporting our bodies enduring trauma, with a particular deep dive into nervines.

**Part two - State Repression:** This section looks at various state tactics including police raids, arrests, dragging people through the courts and other mechanisms of repression and surveillance to repress dissent and control populations. We explore herbal support for shock and panic attacks, as well as long-term chronic stress. We also look at the role of nutrition and gut health in building resilience.

**Part three - Police Violence:** We explore explicit police violence and the arsenal of weapons at their disposal. Tools are shared for herbal medic responses at demonstrations, protests, uprisings and riots, with herbal protocols on chemical weapons exposure, solidarity on the frontlines of occupations and more.

**Part four - Prison:** We talk about the functions and features of the prison system, why prisons are so traumatising, and herbal allies for those surviving the impacts of incarceration inside and out. We look at herbal support for prison visits, phone calls, anger, rage, heartbreak and grief. There is a large part about healing from incarceration written for people who have been in prison themselves.

**Part five - Border Violence:** This section introduces the border regime - the many institutions, people, systems and processes involved in trying to control migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. It is here that I share experiences of organising a mobile herbal clinic in solidarity with more than ten thousand people on the move over half a decade, with many recipes from our project, as well as top tips for people wanting to do similar work. There are also examples from different projects working with people using plant medicine as a tool of solidarity.

**Part six - Genocide, Occupation and War:** Some may not be aware that herbalism can play a role in such contexts but we explore how herbalism has supported armed struggle for freedom over the span of human history, for example through herbal wound care or the use of plants in helping people maintain 'steadfastness' such as the fierce resilience of the Palestinian people. I share my experiences organising Ukraine Herbal Solidarity and give examples



of other herbal solidarity in action.

**Part seven - Plant Allies:** Ten plant profiles of my most beloved and frequently worked-with plant medicines that support the nervous system and recovery from trauma.

**Part eight - Resources:** Includes medicine making instructions and a glossary to help understand any unusual terms, especially those from herbalism.

### **Accessibility**

I want to make this book as accessible as possible. There are different types of content which will appeal to different people depending on your learning style. There are long-form articles where I've tried to introduce state violence and there are recipes and remedies, which I've tried to structure in bullet points and clear instructions.

I find a lot of writing about herbalism to be very ego-driven with lots of abstract ideas and what I call 'fluffy padding'! That can be beautiful for some, but I'm all about the bullet points. I have included links to documentaries and podcasts, including episodes of my own podcast where I discuss many of the subjects from this book.

I want to say thank you to my friend Amani who has drawn the beautiful illustrations scattered through the book. I've also tried to include some graphics where possible. They are all my own unless stated.

For those who prefer audio-visual content over books, my *Herbalism PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course is all video content with lots of slides, graphics and charts. I also have various other workshops available on my website, on subjects like herbalism and incarceration, state violence, burnout and repression. Feel free to check out the whole ecosystem of offerings to find what suits you.

### **Content Warning**

Throughout the book there are references to state violence that many readers will find distressing. This includes, but is not limited to, forms of violence that are more highly felt by populations that are racialised, classed and gendered and people who experience many other forms of oppression. There may be explicit references to violence including forms of arrest and captivity, police raids, police violence on demonstrations, police killings, violence from bailiffs, the courts, prison conditions, suicide and self-harm, sexual violence in prison, loss and death. There is also explicit content around conditions for refugees and

people on the move, including police violence, pushbacks, drownings, hunger and starvation, war trauma (rape, genocide, massacres, displacement, torture) and I'm sure many other horrific experiences of humanity that I have failed to list here.

### **Tensions and Disclaimers**

A lot of the content has emerged from my own experiences and I want to name some of my positions. I am a white, cis, bisexual, mostly able-bodied, working-class, formerly incarcerated person in an England/Wales context. I acknowledge my huge access to resources and different forms of capital. I've been socialised in the heart of empire – socialised in whiteness, capitalism, colonialism and many other oppressive forms of domination. This shapes my life experiences, political worldviews, spirituality and also my approaches to plant medicine, biomedicine and science. This is a huge process of unlearning, dismantling, understanding and reckoning. There will be lots of contradictions, 'both/and', tensions and complexities.

My training comes from mostly white teachers from Ireland and England. In addition, I have undertaken some courses with white herbalists and trauma teachers that are settlers in the so-called United States/Turtle Island. I don't identify as practising 'Western Herbal Medicine' and intentionally reject that language for political reasons. However, I recognise that I am still perpetuating many of the practices and behaviours of that tradition by sharing plant knowledge often in the same ways I have gained it.

I recognise that there are incredible herbal practices that have survived in English, Welsh and Irish contexts (which are my lineages) despite state repression over hundreds of years against these healing modalities. These knowledges have been forcibly integrated with colonial medicine, stolen and appropriated knowledge from Indigenous and traditional peoples on multiple continents through various forms of Empire (British, Chinese, Russian, Turkish and many others). The 'medical pluralism' many embrace is entrenched with power relationships, violence and oppression. None of this is past tense. Colonialism - and resistance to colonialism - continues.

I am aware that people may be reading this book from all over the world – therefore, I encourage you to learn about the relationships to plant medicines in your lineages.

Writing a book is a reckoning with language and how forces, such as the

state, capitalism and colonialism, shape the world. After a lot of reflection, I have decided to use the acronyms UK (United Kingdom) and US (United States) for consistency rather than so-called UK or so-called US because I am talking about these entities in most contexts as nation state bodies that inflict violence. I encourage the decolonial and anticolonial importance of land and territory acknowledgements that recognise Indigenous peoples as the traditional stewards of land and a commitment to decolonisation through active struggle and resistance.

For folks living in the UK, I know there has been much experimentation with ways of drawing attention to British colonialism and decolonising our own islands. Terms I have come across include WISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England) that I learned from the Industrial Workers of the World Union and SCCE+OUK developed by organiser Eshe Kiama Zuri. SCCE+OUK stands for Scotland, Cymru, Éire, England and other areas occupied as 'United Kingdom'. Eshe writes: *"I have created SCCE+OUK as a way to describe the geographical areas we cover, whilst trying to be as respectful to the countries and people within them. Whilst I do not believe in borders, I understand there is a need for countries to free themselves from the imperial United Kingdom or Great Britain, and I acknowledge their traditional names and will constantly update this term to be as inclusive as possible."*<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. <https://eshekiamazuri.com/sceekouk>

## Limitations

I like to see this book as a starting point, a question mark, a first step in building on these huge themes of state violence, solidarity and herbalism. It is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what state violence is. There are many expressions of state violence that remain unexplored in these pages - from welfare violence to the deeper impacts of colonialism on plant traditions.

There are many reasons for this - largely, because documenting the harms of the state would be a lifelong project and there are many texts and projects already taking deep dives into subjects such as herbalism, health and colonialism. Secondly, another factor is the very real personal energy and health limitations as I produced this book through pregnancy and tried to get it birthed before the birth of my own baby. Thirdly, there are biases and limitations based on projects that I know about and have an existing relationship with, for example, the many

contributions to the book came from my small but growing networks of people working in these fields.

**Areas I would have loved to have spoken to more include:**

**Policy and welfare violence** - I had envisioned talking about how state violence is systematically organised to create suffering. The decisions of policymakers dramatically influence people's actual lives, whether that's cuts in the National Health Service or closing down children's centres, reducing benefits or access to care. All of these decisions by the state can cause a great deal of suffering and death. Projects like Healing Justice London or Disabled People Against Cuts have done some amazing work around welfare violence as they try to document how many people have been killed because of, for example, reforms to disability benefits. Likewise, I would have loved to include a whole text on disability justice, the state's role in the pandemic that has been so disabling for millions of people, as well as other examples of state violence as a disabling force.

**Class and herbalism** - I wish that I'd been able to make this a much bigger focus in the book because I think class and economic oppression are massively ignored by most herbalists. These have radically shaped my own life as I grew up with a single mum on benefits. She never accessed a private practitioner, such as a herbalist, because it never felt accessible or possible. The beautiful aspects of herbalism - the harvesting and the foraging and medicine making - just isn't possible for someone who is working every hour under the sun to feed her children or to put herself through university (she later became a mental health nurse after her own struggles). There are so many class factors which influence whether someone gets into herbalism or whether they can support themselves with herbalism or make their own medicine or have the time and energy to do that.

In another world, I would have loved to have interviewed people who were talking about herbalism and access and some of these themes - class and the experiences of working-class herbalists, experiences of experimenting with different economic models such as free clinics or herbal projects or working with unhoused communities.

**Colonial violence against plant traditions** - In section six, I discuss Ukraine Herbal Solidarity and Palestine, but colonialism has shaped herbalism everywhere and has impacted plant traditions worldwide. That is a critical subject that has been written about extensively, and I've tried to include links to resources. One recently published book that comes to mind is *Inflamed* by Rupa

Marya and Raj Patel which explores connections between colonial medicine, as it's framed in the book, and the consequences for people's health - down to the cellular level. There are loads of amazing authors that have talked about how colonialism has affected Indigenous plant traditions in different contexts, whether including the brutal violence of the British state's criminalising of Ayurveda in India and Christian missionaries and settler colonists in the United States who banned and demonised different Indigenous traditions of plant medicines. As someone from a coloniser background, I feel like it's both my obligation to talk about this (I think everyone should be talking about it all the time) and I also want to amplify and listen to the people harmed by, for example, colonialism by the British state. I will put links in the resources section where you can continue to learn about this ongoing colonial violence and how that relates to herbalism.

**White supremacy, racism and herbalism** - Again, this would be a book in and of itself! Racism surfaces in every form of state violence introduced in this book and this is named in the various introductions to each section. While this embeddedness is incredibly important - and we cannot divorce racial oppression from policing, prisons or the border regime - greater depth is always demanded in understanding this insidious form of oppression. In the resources section, I aim to include links to Black, Brown and Indigenous, and other writers of colour who can speak to these experiences in society and in herbalism itself.

**Cisheterosexism, patriarchy and queerness** - I would have loved to have made a feature of queer herbal projects and those organising support for queer communities in defiance of state violence that enforces patriarchy and gender oppression. Once again, I'll include as many links as I can in the resources section to amazing queer herbalists doing this work.

As you can see, the potential is endless! And the expressions of state violence reach into every corner of life. This book is an introduction but I'm going to continue interviewing herbalists and organisers from around the world with my *Frontline Herbalism podcast* to try and bring these themes to light.



## NOTES ON HERBAL SAFETY

There are many important safety considerations that readers need to take into account before using herbal medicine, including making medicine yourself (which I highly encourage!).

### **Plant identification**

- If you are harvesting plants to make medicine yourself, it is extremely important to ensure you have identified the plant correctly before use.
- If you are a beginner herbalist, be sure to invest time learning the poisonous plants of your region, and to make sure you know the herb you are looking for and their ‘lookalikes’ to prevent error.

### **Quality and Integrity of Medicines**

- Many adverse reactions to plants have been due to adulteration, substitution or contamination. Therefore, if you are purchasing herbs, ensure the suppliers have a good reputation demonstrating integrity and high quality plant medicines.
- I encourage you to work with whole plants, not just plant extracts of one constituent.

### **Contraindications**

- Contraindications may occur between a herb and a pharmaceutical medication. They may also occur between existing conditions and a herb. For example, some herbs lower blood pressure so would be contraindicated for people with already low blood pressure. We have very limited collective knowledge on the thousands of potential herb-drug interactions.
- Many herbs can affect the bioavailability of drugs (how much is available to the body). They can also increase or inhibit absorption.
- Certain herbs may also not be safe to take before surgery.
- Always check a trusted resource before use. I recommend the *Botanical Safety Handbook*.

## **Adverse reactions**

- Adverse reactions from herbal medicines are often from misuse or overdose e.g. taking a herb in significantly higher doses than traditionally recommended. Use your common sense and check a trusted resource on recommended herbal dosages.
- Please check if a herb is recommended for short or long term use. Sometimes there may also be withdrawal symptoms when usage is stopped.
- Some plant medicines may trigger what is known as a ‘healing crisis’ which are commonly transient symptoms such as headaches, changes in bowel habits, productive coughing etc.
- Ultimately, my advice is to listen to your body (not always easy for people with PTSD or histories of trauma) but if something doesn’t feel right then stop taking a herb. Your observations are the best evidence for how something is affecting you.

## **Allergies**

- Some people may be allergic to a particular plant or plant family. Most people are generally aware of their allergies, however, if they’ve not tried many herbal medicines before, there is still a chance for a surprise reaction! Some people are allergic to the daisy family (the Asteraceae family) for example.
- Some herbs may cause acute reactions on the skin, such as allergic contact dermatitis, for example, when foraging.
- Some people will be intolerant to alcohol tinctures due to gluten intolerances.
- Some people may be extra sensitive and vulnerable to heightened effects of medicines due to their general constitution. For example, a herb that can increase blood flow to the brain for someone may increase concentration for one person or trigger a headache for another. We all have different levels of sensitivity to different plants. This can change in addition due to health challenges we may be experiencing.

## **Pregnancy**

- Many herbs have not been ‘proven safe’ in pregnancy and therefore caution is exercised.

- Always check a trusted source before use.
- If in doubt, avoid herbs with an emmenagogue action (plants that stimulate menstruation).

### **Lactation**

- Taking herbs during breast feeding can be fantastic but during lactation, herbs may be passed to the baby via breast milk. Some herbs may be too strong or not safe. Check a trusted resource.
- Some herbs can increase or decrease milk production.

### **Energetics**

- Some herbs may be inappropriate or harmful for a person's constitution or 'tissue state' (see the *introduction to the plant profiles* for an explanation of tissue states). For example, for someone with a very hot constitution, having warming herbs could trigger heat signs such as rashes or inflammation.
- Always consider energetics in your herbal decision making - see an explanation of energetics in the introduction to the plant profiles.

### **Essential oils**

- Always use essential oils within recommended quantities in a recipe.
- Avoid internal use unless you have training on the nuances of dosage and safety.
- Use only high quality essential oils.
- Refer to a trusted reference source before use.

# **PART ONE:**

## **STATE VIOLENCE & THE BODY**

# HERBALISM & STATE VIOLENCE

## Introducing the state

*“For the state is permanent violence”*

- Errico Malatesta, Italian anarchist, 1853-1932

When someone says ‘the state’, what do you think of? The Houses of Parliament? Local council offices? Large town halls with old heating systems? Or does your mind wander to the lines of police battering protestors, shooting Black people or inflicting stop-and-searches? Do your thoughts extend to the border force? To people being pepper sprayed on boats to keep them out of ‘British’ waters? Do you think of the thousands of people kept in two by three metre cells mostly because they are poor or use drugs? Does state violence include the child whose only meal that day has been taken away due to welfare cuts? Do thoughts of the state extend to the army bombing whole communities and state-sanctioned murder by soldiers in the name of ‘peace and security’?

We are taught that ruptures in our social order are due to a few ‘bad apples’ and to the consequences of bad decision-making from elected leaders which we rotate every four years. What if this violence is actually not unintended or accidental? What if, in fact, states are violent by design and this monopoly on violence is actually how power is maintained. What if it is a system of domination so entrenched in our psyches we can barely imagine life without the state – despite humans living in stateless communities for millennia. As anarchist Eric Laursen writes: *“The modern State is more powerful, more pervasive, more deeply embedded in our collective psyche, and more adept at co-opting and neutralising challenges to its authority than at any time in its history.”*

He shares that the state is the most successful colonial export of Europe – that even countries and territories winning independence through decades of struggle and resistance to colonisers, ended up adopting the state as their own ‘operating system.’. He frames the state as an ‘operating system’ similar to that of Windows, Apple or Linux because it’s how all these other systems function.

*“By virtually any standard—geographic, economic, cultural, technological—the modern*

*State has been more successful than any previous system at imposing itself on humanity and the earth. Over five centuries, it has harnessed capital, labor, science and technology, and firepower to remake almost the entire world through conquest, slavery, innovation, economic exploitation, the subjugation or evisceration of societies that followed other models, the systematic stripping of the planet's natural resources, and the inculcation of its worldview into every one of us."*

- Eric Laursen, *The Operating System*

Laursen writes how the state relies on both 'hard' police and military power (domination) and various 'soft' forms of persuasion and inducement (hegemony) to enforce acquiescence [acceptance].

State violence is a brutal reality for vast numbers of people; an experience which is racialised, classed and gendered in its design - and application - and which intersects with nearly all forms of oppression. This book explores some of the overt forms of state violence – from its torture of prisoners in solitary confinement, to the violence of evictions and beatings undertaken by border police. But I also want to explore the more subtle and ongoing forms of domination – how chronic stress takes a toll on our bodies, how surveillance can keep a person in a state of constant hypervigilance and flight or flight. I want to expose the ways that the state and capitalist-created poverty can shape our nervous systems and determine our life expectancies.

These are the more invisibilised forms of state violence mastered in the 'art of statecraft'. The tragedy is that through the individualism of neoliberalism, we experience these feelings as a state of personal failure, that we are not 'coping', that we haven't been smart enough to somehow solve the problem of getting out of debt, 'staying out of trouble' or adapting to a world of oppression. From the single mum who cries at the unexpected bill in the post, to the son who finds himself back in the courtroom, to the refugee made homeless or the child orphaned by British bombs, each of us has our lives shaped by state violence, by forces beyond our control in a capitalist system not made to support life, only exploit it.

How can we define state violence when it is so all-encompassing and far-reaching? How do we draw attention to such insidious structures of oppression that despite their widespread violence, are commonly naturalised, normalised and invisibilised to many?

A critical theme of this book is that the state has a monopoly on violence and the ability to utilise violence tactically and their ultimate aim is to counter any

threats to power and maintain control. There are many actors beyond the state that weaponise violence, such as corporations, private security firms, various non-state military groups and so forth. They all share hierarchical forms of organising and the use of violence to sustain power. By ‘monopoly’ here, I’m not suggesting that only the state uses violence. I am speaking to the double standard in which violence can come down the hierarchy (from top to bottom) but when the people fight back or violence goes the other way (from below to above) it’s criminalised, repressed, labelled terrorism and so on. Repression aims to dehumanise, humiliate, segregate and isolate.

The state not only has a large monopoly on violence – it also has a monopoly on our imaginations of what change is possible. By breaking free of this confinement of thought, we may finally have a shot at freedom – a world without the state.

By identifying the true enemy of freedom and free life – the state - we can at least begin to recognise the importance of struggle against it. We can pierce the illusion that electing a different person every few years will somehow get us free. We can embrace the importance of advocating for ways of life that do not rest on exploiting and dominating others. We can bring attention to the thousands of Indigenous Lifeways that have been resisting state formation in honour of human and non-human communities since the dawn of time.

*“There are those who hope to achieve the social revolution through the State by preserving and even extending most of its powers to be used for the revolution. And there are those like ourselves who see the State, both in its present form, in its very essence, and in whatever guise it might appear, [as] an obstacle to the social revolution, the greatest hindrance to the birth of a society based on equality and liberty, as well as the historic means designed to prevent this blossoming. The latter work to abolish the State and not to reform it.”*

- Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role*, Russian Anarchist 1842 – 1921

### **Why connect herbalism and state violence?**

Being a herbalist who focuses on supporting people experiencing state violence might seem pretty niche, but for me, the options for organising, solidarity and health support are absolutely endless. I hope by the end of the book, readers can see how state violence is everywhere; it is deeply entrenched in how our world is shaped.

I have had my own reckoning with state violence and those experiences

drive much of my work. My childhood was shaped by class inequality, I lived through a decade of state repression. For over twenty years I have been engaged with prisoner support and trying to keep my friends alive behind bars. I have been deep in internationalist solidarity and anti-repression work with comrades around the world. I've seen intimately over and over again, how much the state can affect us.

As I've navigated the maze of PTSD and traumatic stress, I've learnt language to help describe nervous system states and how our bodies can experience and express distress. Through training as a herbalist, I've learnt how plants can aid our nervous systems and help us recover from all kinds of chronic illness created or worsened by traumatic stress, including my own years of illness and burnout. This book weaves together these different threads - the state, trauma and solidarity, with a deep love and devotion to plants and herbalism. This is the heartbeat of the Solidarity Apothecary, and as this book shows, the work of many herbalists around the world crafting medicines for the frontlines and their communities.

This love of herbalism isn't always shared. For many people involved in anarchist movements or struggles for liberation, there is often a prejudice against herbal medicine. This commonly stems from self-identification as being very scientific and having rationalist, materialist worldviews. I find that there's nuance and understanding missing about the history of medicine and the oppression and repression of traditional forms of plant medicines, different modalities of healing and more animist worldviews.

Often this is from a failure to explore the implications of dynamics such as colonialism, industrialism, whiteness and the embeddedness of 'Cartesian' worldviews (the body as a machine and separation from nature). There is a, sometimes intentional, ignorance of the rich fields of science that herbalism draws on from complex biochemistry to anatomy and physiology. I hope this book widens people's perspectives on herbalism.

I also want to make it clear that I'm a massive promoter of integrative medicine. I've done pre-hospital care training and I'm extremely grateful that allopathic systems of medicine exist. But I also know that they are not the only form of healing or medicine. They need to be integrated as a part of an ecosystem of care and support, and we have to name that the medical industrial complex harms people. I think health in general is extremely political and is a really important terrain of struggle.

My other aim with this book is to 'howl for my pack' and find herbalists



committed to deepening their political understandings of herbalism, who work or are keen to work with plant medicines to support people harmed by state violence and those most oppressed by our systems.

## **The Importance of Solidarity**

*“Care is the antidote to violence”*

- Saidiya Hartman, Abolitionist author and academic

Solidarity is the main weapon we have to counter state violence. It comes in many beautifully diverse forms emerging from movements and moments in time in different incarnations, often connecting us to ancestors who resisted domination before us. These acts of solidarity might look like writing inspiring statements of defiance before being hung at the gallows, smuggling food and medicines across frontlines, coordination for breaking out enslaved people, or fighting back against colonisers. People across the world have been fighting back and enacting different forms of solidarity in response to violence and oppression for millennia.

At the time that I write this section for the book, Gaza is being bombed by the Israeli Occupation Forces which are committing genocide against the Palestinian people. International solidarity has looked like global strikes, sabotage of supply chains and the blocking of ports and other infrastructure. It's taken the form of direct action against weapons manufacturers, marches and demonstrations in cities around the world. It takes form in solidarity statements, graphics, artwork and relentless media creation and sharing on social media. It looks like mass fundraising efforts for mutual aid to help people stay alive. The depth and creativity of solidarity has no limits.

In this book I want to highlight herbal solidarity in practice - the many creative ways herbalists from around the world have supported people experiencing state violence, highlighting how herbalism can be embedded in these movements for liberation. I hope that people can see that there is a role for everyone in struggles for liberation, whether it's doing first aid at a refugee camp or distributing medicines to local queers or providing care to people leaving prison, there are so many ways that we can build our resources for community care and love for each other as well as strengthen ourselves to keep fighting.

What I hope to make clear is that all of these horrific systems of state

violence also need resistance: they need to be consistently challenged by ongoingly adapting social movements. Whether it's resisting new legislation for deportations or fighting the expansion of new prisons, there's always an element of fighting and resistance. Movement work is commonly exhausting and can be engines of burnout and trauma. We need our healers, carers and herbalists to help keep those movements going and keep them alive. For me that's the most beautiful offering of plant medicine

## TRAUMA AND THE BODY

This section is a brief introduction to trauma. We will explore common trauma dynamics that contribute to what can make an experience particularly traumatising, before exploring how trauma can manifest in the body and the main ways we can express distress. As with all sections of the book, this is a very short introduction to a major field that is constantly developing.

### **What is trauma?**

The word ‘trauma’ has its roots in the Greek word τραύμα for wound or damage. One definition of trauma is a distressing, disturbing or wounding experience or injury experienced in many ways over a lifetime. I think that’s a really beautiful, and inclusive, definition because it challenges hierarchies around what is or isn’t ‘serious enough’ to be considered traumatic. This definition acknowledges that humans go through different experiences that distress us and trauma is our response to these experiences. It’s not just what we’ve gone through, it’s also how our body is responding. People often centre trauma conversation around the nervous system or other parts of the body. I’m critical of that focus because I think we also need to name the structural forces that shape us.

### **Common Trauma Dynamics**

There are many aspects that contribute to what can make an experience particularly traumatising. Trauma can result from a threat to our life or, for example, witnessing another person being killed or facing death ourselves. Traumatic experiences tend to alter, even destroy, our assumptions of safety. Of course, not everyone grows up with a feeling of safety in the world, so that baseline can already be very different depending on a person’s experiences.

Traumatic experiences often involve abandonment, and not having the resources or the support to deal with whatever we are facing. Traumatic experiences can overwhelm us and leave us powerless. We can be rendered helpless by an overwhelming force - a hurricane or a flood for example. It could be a situation in which your home or your village is destroyed, and it can also be a situation of state violence. The state is an overwhelming force that can

dominate us and our lives.

Captivity is also inherently traumatising. I feel this one very strongly having lived in a cage for nearly two years. Again, there are different ways that this can look – it could be a police cell, a domestic violence situation, a kidnapping. In general, captivity involves an inability to escape prolonged and repeated coercive control. There may be a threat of death or harm, there might be isolation or submission. I think one of the main traumatic things in prison is the violation of our own moral principles. We have to watch officers attack people and we know that if we intervene, we're going to get beaten ourselves, so we stay quiet. These kinds of situations are complex, dehumanising and can be deeply traumatising.

Trauma instils fear in different ways. That could include anxiety, hypervigilance or distress. Trauma really compounds over time with other traumatic experiences such as childhood trauma, racial trauma, sexual trauma, or medical trauma. The many different kinds intersect and are tangled together. They cannot be separated.

For example, if a child is sexually abused, that might harm their ability to participate in the school system. That marginalisation might then lead them to prison. In turn, they end up having other traumatic experiences in prison - it's all connected. These themes are something I explore in depth in my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course.

### **A word on Post-Traumatic Stress 'Disorder'**

There has been a lot of critique about the use of the word 'disorder' in the diagnosis of PTSD. There has also been some pushback in general against state psychology models which force people into simplistic disorders and situations of state violence, such as imprisonment in psychiatric facilities. In prison, people are often diagnosed with 'personality disorders', and it is used as a weapon to prevent them from being released.

I'm also aware that for some people it can be incredibly empowering to have a diagnosis that describes their experiences - it's complicated. It might be liberating, for example, to receive an ADHD diagnosis and to be able to finally access needed support. That can be life-changing.

I think it comes down to individual choice. I use the term PTSD because it's well-known and it's a part of common language that people understand. I don't believe that the body is disordered in the way it responds to stress - I think it makes absolute evolutionary sense that we have all these different symptoms.

I also want to acknowledge that PTSD as a diagnosis was born from political struggle; it was used by US veterans returning from the Vietnam war, struggling to have their trauma recognised. In *Combat Trauma: Imaginaries of War and Citizenship* in post-9/11 America, Nadia Abu El Haj looks at the trauma of veterans from the place of being perpetrators, of the impacts of killing other humans and the reckoning of guilt that comes with this. It is very different to the soldier-as-victim narrative which we commonly hear. Feminists and survivors of domestic violence have also fought hard through advocating and lobbying to have PTSD recognised in contexts beyond the warzone. I honour these decades of struggle for validation while also acknowledging the limitations of modern psychiatric systems. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) which aims to standardise and classify ‘mental disorders’, underpins a state psychiatry system of incarceration. Trauma, societal conditions and neurobiological factors need holistic solutions, not more people in cages.

### **How does trauma manifest in the body?**

Every single person is unique, and trauma shapes every single person’s body differently. There are many ways in which we express distress, including nightmares and panic attacks, but also longer-term conditions like chronic illness and disease. We are really intimately connected to our environments and the various forces that shape our lives. We might experience ongoing activation of the fight or flight response which exhausts our adrenal glands or creates so many stress hormones that the liver can’t work properly.

There are many other pathways in which traumatic life experiences can be expressed as chronic illness in the body, such as inflammation. PTSD symptoms include sleep disturbances, changes in worldview, memories, flashbacks, and triggers, chronic disconnectedness, arousal, and reactivity.

Hyperarousal is common, and it makes a lot of sense as a coping mechanism. A person who has been attacked by a bear is literally scared of getting attacked again. If you’ve been in an unsafe situation, it makes sense that your body is trying to keep you safe by being aware of what’s going on around you. The fight or flight sympathetic nervous system is activated, the body is mobilising energy and resources.

We might experience increasing reactivity over time in the form of hypervigilance and a feeling of being constantly on edge, scanning for danger, being suspicious and having a lot of muscle tension. It might also look like frequent feelings of anger and rage, being irritable, or full of grief, having

thoughts of revenge, trying to deal with the injustice in the world. There can be a loss of emotional control. For example, you can't close the lid of a box properly, so you get angry and throw it against the wall - you can't regulate yourself and your behaviour might become destructive. Rage and arousal can be turned in different directions. They might manifest in a general kind of recklessness, or survival mechanisms like workaholism (that's my response), self-harm, or drugs, including alcohol.

I talk about it in terms of an 'altered baseline'. Sometimes we're scared and it makes sense because we're keeping ourselves safe and other times it doesn't make sense because we're not in any present danger. This anxiety can be generalised and unfocused - a constant sense of dread. It can also manifest as panic attacks which are overwhelming surges of nervous system energy often accompanied by panicked breathing and raised heart rate.

Sleep disturbances are very common for people with PTSD or those dealing with trauma. People might have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. They might experience nightmares or distressing dreams. There's a meme that I find very appropriate here: one person asks another how their night went, and the second person replies, "Well, I didn't get much sleep, but I did squeeze in a few hours of anxiety." When I work as a herbalist, addressing someone's sleep is always my starting point.

As well as the effects that trauma has on our bodies, it also influences how we relate to other people. We may experience relationship challenges, fearfulness, struggling to feel safe, struggling to trust people. We may have diminished interest in things that once gave us meaning and purpose. There can be a tendency to self-isolate and withdraw. And then there's often just this general feeling of being alienated, that no-one can understand what you've been through. There's often an element of self-disconnection and dissociation, feeling numb or feeling hopeless.

Changes in worldview are another really significant trauma pattern. Trauma can create a rupture in our lives. It shatters our assumptions of safety, our understandings about the meaning of life, maybe of humanity and what human beings are capable of. People may feel betrayed. Trauma is often accompanied by a sensation of grief and a sense that something cannot be undone. People might experience guilt, shame, self-blame, or self-loathing. They often feel unlovable or 'ruined'. They might describe themselves as 'bad, dirty, or toxic'. There can be suicidal thoughts and a belief that we do not have the resources to meet the demands of our lives. I think these are some of the hardest states to shift.

Another big part of the PTSD puzzle is around the brain and memories, flashbacks and triggers. It's really common for people with PTSD to experience recurrent, involuntary and distressing memories. It's also common for people to have memory loss, challenges with recall, or generalised amnesia.

It's worth noting that the brain is doing this to protect us. Flashbacks appear to be an unintegrated, unprocessed memory of an overwhelming event which keeps coming back to us because we've still got work to do to process that trauma. Brain scans have shown that people with PTSD have a missing link where we're just less able to put something to the back of our mind. That often feels like a compounding effect to me - if we have so much going on over such a long period of time, where does it all go and how long is it going to take to integrate and process these memories?

I see trauma as time travel. It's not just the present, it's also flashbacks to the past, it's also anxiety about the future. This concept of trauma as time travel came to life in one of my best friends' novels, called *Margins and Murmurations*, where the protagonist, an incredible trans woman who led a life of resistance, keeps having flashbacks and moving through time. Triggers are emotional and physiological reactions to reminders. They are something like a warning, a communication about what is safe and not safe.

Modern psychiatry often tells us to avoid triggers, but in my experience, I think people can also be very drawn to them. Trauma can become a source of meaning and aliveness. For myself, I think about prison all the time. My whole life is designed around supporting people in prison. And still, prison is a big trigger for me. My old therapist called this my 'death drive', a Freudian psychoanalytic theory about being drawn to self-destructiveness. I don't like how resistance is pathologised but I can see how there is an element of self-sabotage somehow by being constantly drawn to our triggers.

Triggers are information. Our body is communicating to us that our world isn't safe and that we need to do something about it, be it therapy or some kind of healing work, or taking action to 'destroy what destroys us'. Triggers can also tell us what is unsafe for our communities.

### **Emotional strategies in response to trauma and state violence**

One strategy to deal with trauma is minimisation, pretending (or even believing) that everything is fine. In our animal liberation campaign, it was really

like this. Nothing we went through compared to the suffering of the animals. People said, “prison is basically a holiday camp” and so on. It was macho bullshit, and also a learned survival strategy. Ultimately it wasn’t effective in meeting people’s needs.

Suppression is another strategy. We might refuse to discuss things or complain about a campaign or a challenging person. Sometimes it makes sense in terms of avoiding being triggered or retraumatised by something but often it comes from a desire to suppress difficult feelings.

In some ways, the opposite is dramatisation. Sometimes people just can’t stop talking about something, a traumatising event becomes the centre of their world and they need to verbally process it and constantly analyse what happened. I’ve seen this a lot and it often leads to people needing to leave a movement. Without the tools for recovery and collective support, a traumatic experience can feel insurmountable and ‘out’ can feel like the only option. Staying involved in a social movement where arrest, house raids or threat of imprisonment is a constant reality, can feel impossible to bear. For many, the only option to feel safety is to stop organising completely and embrace a life without higher risk political action.

## **Understanding the Sympathetic and Parasympathetic nervous system**

Throughout the book, you will hear me reference ‘sympathetic’ and ‘parasympathetic’ a lot. I just wanted to share a brief explanation of these terms to complement the text. In my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course, I share a ‘nervous system deep dive’ exploring the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system much more.

The nervous system allows us to interact and communicate with our external environment. Through it, we are in a constant relationship with everything around us. We have our central nervous system (our brain and spinal cord). And we have our peripheral nervous system - the nervous tissue beyond the brain and spinal cord. We have our voluntary nervous system where we can control our movements. We also have involuntary systems that are automatic and subconscious.

Below I aim to breakdown the differences between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. We need both states at different times and they’re both essential to our survival as a species. I want to preface that there is



much more complexity beyond this binary!

### **Sympathetic nervous system**

- The sympathetic nervous system is the network of nerves that help the body activate its 'fight or flight response'.
- The autonomic nervous system hijacks biological functions based on the needs of safety and defence.
- It puts us in a state of increased energy, mobilised resources, and a readiness to act.

The sympathetic nervous system triggers a whole raft of physiological effects, such as:

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased metabolism
- Increased breathing rate
- Dilation of pupils
- Release of stress hormones
- Redirection of blood to the peripheries
- Digestive system effects such as:
- Constriction (sphincters, blood vessels etc)
- Inhibition of peristalsis
- Inhibition of saliva production
- Release of glucose from liver

### **Parasympathetic nervous system**

- The parasympathetic nervous system helps us rest and metabolise.
- It enables improved digestion i.e 'rest & digest'.
- It enables maintenance and repair of tissues and conserves energy of the body, as well as supporting immunity.
- This nervous system state creates calmness and connection to others, 'clearer thinking', and a sensation of safety.
- The parasympathetic state prepares us for sleep.

The parasympathetic nervous system also triggers a whole raft of physiological effects, such as:

- Decreased heart rate

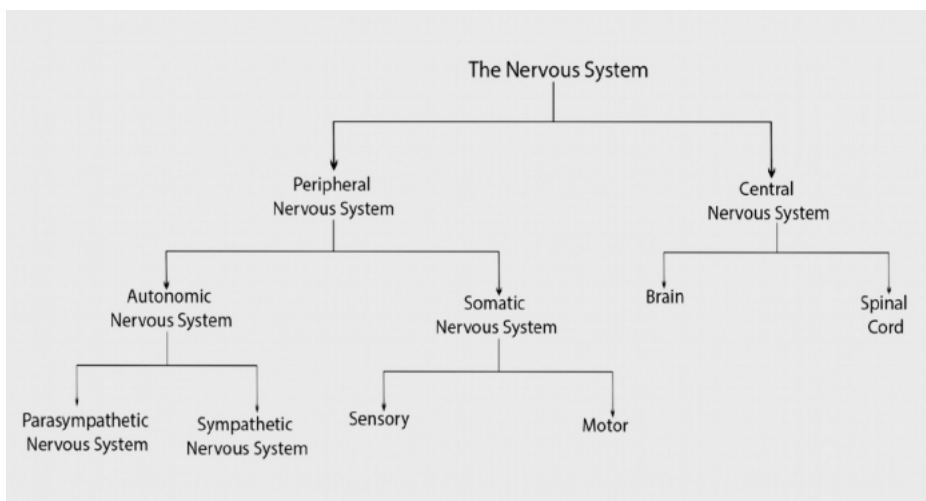
- Decreased blood pressure
- Decreased metabolism
- Decreased breathing rate
- Pupil constriction
- Redirection of blood to the core
- Contraction of the bladder
- Digestive system effects such as:
  - Relaxation (sphincters, blood vessels etc)
  - Normal peristalsis and bowel movements
  - Normal saliva production
  - Uptake of glucose
  - Blood moves away from peripheries
  - Pupil constriction (allowing focus)
  - Acts on the lacrimal glands that produce tears
  - Contracts the bladder

Many digestive system effects such as:

- Stimulates salivation in the mouth
- Relaxes sphincters of stomach and intestines
- Increases digestive secretions - hydrochloric acid, bile, pancreatic enzymes
- Coordinates peristaltic movements of the intestines
- Allows bowel movements

I hope this introduction to these two nervous system states has been helpful. I encourage people to desist from labelling the states as good or bad. Both are absolutely crucial to not only surviving but thriving in this world. When we are activated (in sympathetic) but at the same time feel safe and social, we engage in a state of play. We may also employ our sympathetic nervous systems to simply get things done, and to get our bodies moving or running, for example. Again, please remember that our bodies and nervous systems are so much more complicated than a simple binary.

The challenge for our nervous systems comes when one of the nervous system states becomes dominant. For example, with a sympathetic dominance, we have little time for rest and recovery, for tissues to repair or for inflammation to be reduced. Living in an ongoing state of hyperarousal for example, where



our sympathetic nervous system is activated, means all of the physiological functions above are also happening for much longer than the body may have resources to sustain.

For anyone who has looked after a companion animal such as a dog, we can see that they may be barking in an excited frenzy for one minute at something interesting or exciting, but then almost instantly fall back to sleep and snooze for several hours. Humans are less skilled at such a smooth transition - instead we can become stuck in states such as chronic anxiety and hyperarousal. Perpetually pumping out stress hormones, for example, can cause a cascade of physiological effects from chronic high blood sugar (leading to type 2 diabetes or insulin resistance, for example) or to autoimmune conditions, chronic pain and more. This is something I explore in more detail in my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course and I will also include some resources in the resources section about how traumatic stress can shape the body longer-term.

## HERBALISM & TRAUMA RECOVERY

### **What are the roles of plant medicines in navigating trauma?**

In a world full of injustice and oppression that can be deeply traumatising, we need plant medicines more than ever. I've got countless memories of plant medicines playing incredible roles in supporting people surviving the worst of what a human can experience. This book is full of examples of plants working their magic, from alleviating colds and flu in refugee camps, to soothing grieving hearts fleeing invasion, to sustaining organisers resisting genocide, to helping people heal from decades of incarceration and captivity.

One thing has always been clear to me - plants take care of us when our bodies express the distress we feel. PTSD and traumatic stress can be unrelenting and unforgiving. Unlike common trauma narratives, what we are going through isn't always in the past. It's not always historic experiences remaining unprocessed in our bodies. Traumatic stress can be ongoing and be very much in the present. And unfortunately, it is often a big exhausting mix of both - past and present.

Whatever we've gone through, or are going through, our bodies express distress in different ways: anxiety, panic attacks, nightmares, flashbacks, insomnia, bouts of anger and rage, digestive issues, headaches, regular coughs/colds/infections, chronic inflammation, muscle pain and more. Plant medicines can support us to manage and recover from many of these symptoms to help us find steady ground in what can feel like a world of chaos.

Plants can also play a role in taking care of us when we struggle to trust other humans. For people who've had their trust shattered, the more-than-human world offers relationships of love, connection and stability that can help people survive what they should have never had to endure. Plants can teach us new ways of being in our bodies and help us move into a more 'parasympathetic' nervous system state i.e. 'rest and digest'.

Feeling better is bigger than ingesting a herb through a tincture or a tea. It is the act of herbalism itself - being outside, growing plants, foraging, medicine making - that heals us. I want people to feel inspired by this book to develop a rich relationship with the world around you and feel supported by plant medicines. With plants, you are never alone.

I've also learned over the years that plants take care of us over the long-haul as we survive what is messed up in the world, and transform it together. The sad reality is, the world isn't likely to become less traumatising any time soon. Equipping ourselves with the skills to take care of ourselves and each other is essential. Herbalism is a life-long journey. Plant medicines can transform your life by enabling a deeper relationship with the land, improving sleep and digestion, preventing disease, reducing inflammation and aiding the nervous system to rest and recover while surviving and resisting this oppressive world.

In this section, I'm going to introduce some of the herbs that play critical roles in recovery from trauma, more specifically nervines.

### **What are nervines?**

Nervines are plants with an affinity for the nervous system. We'll dive deeply into what they are and then we'll look at some practical examples.

As a recap - the nervous system allows us to interact and communicate with our external environment. Through it, we are in a constant relationship with everything around us. It's good to remember that all medicinal herbs influence the nervous system in different ways because our nerves innervate and impact most tissues and organs of the body. But nervines are a special category known for their actions on the nervous system. They are helpful for us as herbalists to work with to help someone with their physical and emotional health (which are never separate).

Plants don't fit into tidy little boxes and a single plant might, for example, be a nerve tonic and it may also have a relaxant action. It can be helpful to differentiate some of the effects that plants can have on our nervous system and it's good to be specific. We're going to be exploring relaxant nervines, cardiac nervines, hypnotic nervines, stimulating nervines and nerve tonics.

### **Relaxant nervines**

First, relaxant nervines. These are herbs that help the body reduce the activation of the sympathetic nervous system - introduced in the trauma and the body section. By working with these herbs, we can reduce anxiety, we can support our sleep, we can lower blood pressure. A lot of nerve relaxants also have a carminative action (a kind of antispasmodic action) on the gut. They can relieve tension, including headaches and musculoskeletal tension and pain, and many have a direct action on neurotransmitters, reducing activation in the

central nervous system.

I like to frame this chronic activation of the sympathetic nervous system as ‘background noise’. It is a constant feeling of underlying anxiety in your day, and it doesn’t take much to get triggered or upset or activated. This is especially common with people with PTSD or ongoing traumatic stress. The body is suspended in a constant state of hypervigilance. For lots of people, this state is completely normalised, and we don’t really know any other way of being.

Herbs are wonderful in ‘turning down’ that background noise. When you start to have the language and the tools to understand your different nervous system states, it becomes easier to work with herbs to ‘hack’ your nervous system and shift your own state. For me, nervine relaxants have been life-changing and they’re my primary go-to for supporting most people experiencing anxiety.

I had a client who came to me with anxiety as their primary complaint. Interestingly during our second consultation, about six weeks later, they had forgotten that anxiety was the main reason they were seeing me. They talked about their asthma and loose stools and so on and I asked them, “But how’s your anxiety?” Although it had been such a big pattern of their life, the herbs had really helped.

Herbs can be incredible allies when we know how to work with them, and different research papers and human trials show them giving amazing support for anxiety and the nervous system.

So which plants are nervine relaxants? Lavender is a classic example. So are lemon balm, chamomile, catnip, feverfew and many others. I will introduce as many as I can throughout this book and talk about their amazing medicinal properties and nuances.

### **Hypnotic nervines**

Hypnotic nervines are strong, sedating, tranquilising herbs that have a different effect on the nervous system. As we’ve seen, relaxant nervines can be amazing throughout the day to turn down background anxiety and to support someone in a moment of acute stress. Hypnotic nervines on the other hand are really powerful remedies in helping induce sleep. They’re often very strong antispasmodics for pain and tension and they can help trigger a state of full body relaxation.

It’s important to remember that for some people, feeling sedated or knocked out isn’t ideal. It can trigger a trauma response in them including feelings of

distress and danger, especially if they've been through a traumatic experience in that sedated state. For example, if someone has experienced medical trauma under anaesthetic, or been sedated with drugs or alcohol and experienced sexual trauma, then this sedated state can be extremely triggering. In a similar way that the parasympathetic nervous system state is unfamiliar to many people who've experienced a lot of trauma, this state of sedated full-body relaxation can also be very unfamiliar. At the same time, some people crave it, self-medicating with opiates, for example, to achieve this full body relaxation state.

It's worth bearing in mind that pharmaceutical sedatives are often the first port of call used by the psychiatric and medical industrial complex for someone who is in distress. When I was in prison, I cannot tell you how many people were just knocked out with sedatives. It was terrifying to see people so sedated, walking around almost like ghosts. In another context, that state could be someone's choice, a way of dissociating from imprisonment or trauma, but usually in these cases, it was a non-consensual use of sedatives. If someone's 'having an incident', they get injected with something. That was something that happened a lot when my close friend Taylor was sectioned and I'm sure people reading this may have had similar experiences.

Pharmaceutical sedatives can have really long-term repercussions for health. They can impact the heart, liver, respiratory system. They have all sorts of impacts on the mitochondria, which are essential for our energy levels and might lead to serious chronic fatigue.

So hypnotic nervines are not for everyone, but I'm probably making them out to be scary or too strong. I think we can experiment with all herbs, and we can combine them so we can have a slightly stronger sedating herb with a more relaxant herb. We can also start off with really small doses. The key point here is that strong sedatives are not necessarily our go-to as herbalists. For even more complexity however, what can feel strong and sedating to one person might not even make an impact for someone else! Everybody is different. Wild lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) for example completely knocks me for six, but for someone else it might not even touch the sides. We are all really different. Likewise, some people just respond better to relaxing nervines. Something like lavender might do the job instead of California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) for example.

Some of the hypnotic nervines in our herbalist toolkits include mugwort, California poppy, hops, wild lettuce, passionflower, skullcap (which I'll talk about more in the nerve tonic section) and valerian.

I find skullcap really fantastic, and I would almost place it more in the tonic category than a sedating nervine because I think it is very safe and gentle, but it can definitely trigger that feeling of parasympathetic state. For me I might recommend someone take skullcap every night for two months for example and that means they're getting all these amazing nutrients and nerve tonic actions but they're also really teaching their body how to have winding down, parasympathetic time before sleeping. That can really help shift things like nightmares in my experience.

Wild lettuce is a very strong hypnotic for me. When my best friend killed himself last year in prison, I was so acutely distressed and triggered and in such a rage state that getting to sleep was basically impossible. But if I just took a giant swig of wild lettuce, I could go from a hundred to zero and finally kind of collapse in exhaustion. I explore this herb more in the herbal allies for grief section.

Something like lavender oil will be more gentle and helpful at helping me sleep on a day where, you know, maybe I'm a bit anxious about money or I've had some stressful emails or something more mundane.

The power of herbalism is knowing in depth about all of these different plants, when they're appropriate, when they're not appropriate and when there's a gentler alternative.

## **Nerve tonics**

Alright, these are bad boys that every herbalist needs to know. We all need to have an in-depth knowledge of these plants because in late-stage capitalism, nearly everyone's nervous system is completely messed up. I don't know many people that are not living in a really intense state of stress - all of our nervous systems need a bit of nourishment. Most health conditions people are presenting will have a nervous system component. So having these herbs in our toolbox is really important.

Nerve tonics are herbs which act to tonify, strengthen and restore the proper structure and function of the nervous system. Some examples include milky oats, betony, licorice, St. John's wort, tulsi, evening primrose, elderberry, schisandra, ashwagandha and vervain. These are the particular nerve tonics that I focus on. I've chosen herbs that are generally in my lineage and if they're not in my lineage, then they're plants that I can grow. I want to acknowledge all the different aspects around colonialism and botany and people stealing people's



medicines from all over the world. I've chosen these particular herbs because they're herbs that I have a relationship with and herbs that I can grow in my bioregion and make my own medicine with. And they are just amazing plants as well.

Certain deficiencies are very significant in terms of how much anxiety someone is experiencing. Vitamin B12, for example, is essential to nervous system functioning and can help with supporting the repair of the nervous system. Our nerves have something called myelin sheath, which is a layer of fat that surrounds the nerves. Certain plants like skullcap, which is also a nerve tonic, can literally help with the repair of the myelin sheath, which is something that most pharmaceuticals can't do.

We might also work with herbal oils because our body needs fat for our nervous system to function well. A deficiency of healthy fats can often lead to nervous system dysfunction. Lavender oil is one of my favourites.

Lots of these nerve tonics can support the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis (HPA axis - explained in the glossary), which is how we activate our sympathetic nervous system and how we respond to stress. The brain communicates to our pituitary gland that we need our stress hormones because we need action. Supporting this HPA axis is an integral part of how a lot of how nerve tonics support the body.

Nerve tonics can also help address sleep disturbances longer-term. My priority as a herbalist is always getting the people I'm supporting to sleep well. It's my number one clinical priority because sleep is so essential to recovering from chronic illness and disease. It's also the thing taken away from us by PTSD and chronic stress because our nervous systems are so activated. Some of these plants are fantastic at allowing us to access that deeper kind of REM sleep that we need to process our memories and our trauma (learn more about REM in the section on nightmares).

Nerve tonics can provide the body with antioxidants. They can be supportive for the immune system and they can help with the production of neurotransmitters. Nerve tonics can also be especially supportive for the liver. The liver is where we metabolise and process our stress hormones and the environmental demands of our lives. Often, we have what's known as liver stagnation. If you're chronically in a sympathetic state, you're not getting enough blood flow to the liver and these essential functions are slowed down. Many of these plants are fantastic at supporting the liver by increasing blood flow and repairing damage.

A lot of nerve tonics help with circulation, specifically getting blood to the brain and the central nervous system. They can aid our gut flora - the little ecosystem in our digestive tract - which is essential to not only digesting our food and getting energy, but also has a massive influence on emotional health. These herbs can also help address inflammation in the GI tract.

Many nerve tonics can help to directly relieve nerve pain like sciatica. They can help address blood sugar imbalances, which can contribute to anxiety and an up-and-down, roller coaster feeling. They can help us survive if we're going through it right now and they can help us recover from long term stress and trauma. They also do a million and one other actions. They are such a beautiful gift to our bodies. I think nerve tonics are a necessary part of every herbalist's apothecary and in my opinion, we should be learning about them in much more depth.

### **Cardiac nervines**

These are herbs that support the nervous system through their affinity with the heart and the cardiovascular system. Examples of cardiac nervines include yarrow, hawthorn, motherwort, rose and linden (lime) flowers. Again, a single herb can have multiple functions. Hawthorn is also an amazing nerve tonic for instance and some of these plants are amazing gentle relaxants, like rose, for example.

Cardiac nervines can have many different medicinal actions. They can have a gentle, relaxing action through the body, relaxing muscles and blood vessels. They can help reduce blood pressure especially in connection to the sympathetic, fight or flight state.

Hawthorn berries contain anthocyanins that relax the blood vessels directly. They contain flavonoids, the constituents which help protect the blood vessels from oxidative stress and damage and help improve the elasticity of the arteries. They can aid with blood vessel integrity due to their high antioxidant content. They may help with lowering cholesterol in the bloodstream and the liver which can help reduce risk of heart attack and high blood pressure. They can help improve coronary circulation - circulation within the heart - helping with things like angina.

They can act as circulatory stimulants, helping with blood flow, especially where there is venous insufficiency (when your veins have trouble sending blood from your limbs back to the heart). For example, haemorrhoids, where there

isn't enough blood flow to a certain area of tissues. Some cardiac nervines such as lime flowers can also help with sleep disturbances and help induce a restful sleep.

Nearly all cardiac nervines can support with heart palpitations. My favourite for this is motherwort which has a fantastic calming action on heart palpitations. Herbs like motherwort can also have cardiotonic properties meaning they can actually help aid heart activity rhythm.

Most of the cardiac nervines that I've listed are energetically quite cooling, so they can help with signs of heat in the body such as inflammation. They have an energetic quality that can support the emotional heart – the feelings of grief and heartbreak and distress which are big aspects of trauma and trauma recovery.

Trauma has a huge emotional impact on us, sometimes literally shattering what we thought we knew about the world or rupturing our sense of safety. A lot of people experience trauma after the loss of a loved one, the loss of someone they're in love with, or even losing a campaign, a project, a house. Cardiac nervines are amazing because they have these multiple effects on the cardiovascular system and the heart, and they really help to shift pain that is stored there. There's a lot of research about people having heart attacks, for example, or heart failure, after losing someone they love<sup>1</sup>. Heartache is very real.

Look what's happening right now in Gaza, it's absolutely horrific, and these are events that create tremendous grief and rage in our bodies. Those feelings are stored and they're generally stored in our hearts. Cardiac nervine herbs are really beautiful, powerful allies for the emotional heart, as well as preventing heart disease.

### **Stimulating nervines**

These are herbs that have a gentle stimulant action on the nervous system.

I differentiate them from the more hardcore stimulants like coffee, tea, and yerba maté which are all also plant medicines. Capitalism has created a hyperarousal-exhaustion cycle where we're dependent on stimulants for energy. I love a posh coffee from time to time, but I know it's kind of a false energy. Stimulants can help us get through our day, but ultimately they are going to eventually deplete our systems if we use too much of them or come to depend on them for energy. Stimulants, such as tea and coffee also have an interesting political history. This is most obvious with colonialism and tea plantations, for example, however tea was also brought to the UK to be used to make people

work longer in factories. I believe our dependency on stimulants is an integral part of the capitalist system.

With herbalism, we're looking at how we can increase our energy in different ways. There aren't any magic formulas. Everyone comes to me saying, 'oh, I want to have more energy', but to actually improve our energy, we might need to improve our sleep, our nutrition, and our mitochondrial health. We might need to reduce the activation in our nervous system. These changes will allow us to use less of our body's resources.

In a PTSD context, many people are already experiencing hyperarousal symptoms - they might have a racing heart or anxiety for example, so therefore putting stimulants in the mix isn't always the best option. If I'm super anxious and I drink coffee, I will sometimes shake because my nervous system is so active.

The stimulating nervines that I explore personally, include rosemary, hyssop, sage, and thyme, which are all familiar culinary herbs.

As well as fight or flight, we can fall into a freeze response. There still might be a lot of background activation but we see a depression of function, for example fatigue, lack of movement, brain fog, and dissociation. There might be a drop in blood pressure and heart rate, decreased metabolism, loss of hope and a sense of hollowness.

When my best friend killed himself, I was in an extremely intense state of rage, but, after that activation, came exhaustion and despair where I would just lie on my bed for weeks at a time, unable to move, unable to cry, unable to really function. I didn't want to eat, and everything felt hopeless.

I asked myself what the point of all this abolitionist work was if nothing was going to work and people were just going to keep dying. It was very immobilising; I was frozen. There are different ways out of a nervous system state like that. Some acute stress – a threat for example - will often get an animal out of this state. I was stuck in that state until I had to put up a fight about something, which gave me a new mobilisation of energy. But pushing through might also lead to more fatigue. We can also respond to this frozen state with gentleness. It might be small things. I remember having a little post-it note that said “Brush your teeth, get changed, move to the sofa”, and that was it. If I could do those three things, even if I was just going to lie there and watch reruns of Bondi Rescue, then that's what I was going to do. Having that little list was the gentleness I needed to survive that period.

People sometimes think that if you have depression, you should push

through, do exercise and all that. But actually, in my experience, it's all about gentleness. Stimulating nervines therefore have to be gentle themselves. They're not stimulants that will trigger this sympathetic fight or flight high mobilisation of energy, but they will help us regain a bit of vitality, maybe a bit of movement, a shifting in how we're feeling. They can simultaneously calm and uplift us.

Rosemary, for example, is an amazing circulatory stimulant, so it can help move blood to the brain, making it useful for headaches and migraines and aiding in concentration and memory. But it's also a relaxant for tension. Rosemary has neuroprotective antioxidants (constituents that help prevent the brain from damage), and it's antispasmodic. It has a simultaneous shifting, moving, circulating action but with calmness and gentleness. It's a nervine and not a hardcore stimulant that forces our body to mobilise energy from a place of stress. Interestingly these plants are all warming and drying (see an explainer of these terms in the introduction to the plant profiles section). And they all have an affinity for the gut. They are generally antimicrobial and supportive of our gut ecosystem. They're also commonly used as respiratory decongestants and relaxants.

## **Conclusion**

This was a brief introduction to the roles of plant medicines in supporting trauma recovery, especially nervines that have an amazing affinity with the nervous system. Through deepening our relationship to these plants, we can come to work with them in everyday life - this may mean taking gentle relaxants through our day to support our stress responses, or it could mean working with sedating nervines to improve the quantity and quality of our sleep. There will be times when we are called on to work with nerve tonics during or after longer periods of chronic stress, and there will be times when we bring cardiac nervines into our lives to ease grief and heartbreak. As detailed through the different sections, herbal medicines have many offerings to all different systems of our bodies, from our digestion to our immune system, which all come into play as part of creating and sustaining health over the long-haul. I will continue to draw on these different plant medicines through the book, aiming to bring their practical applications to life.

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## COLLECTIVE RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

I've introduced trauma as distressing, disturbing or wounding experience or injury experienced in many ways over a lifetime and I've shared some of the ways in which trauma can shape the body. Now I want to speak to the importance of collective responses to trauma and traumatic stress. Mainstream approaches to trauma recovery are often completely centred on the individual and are generally very reductionist, suggesting only a handful of tools normally gatekept by professionals. For example, a six-session bout of cognitive behavioural therapy and nothing more. I think it is vital that we do not approach trauma recovery as an individualistic journey but one that embraces connection with others as a foundation of healing. As I mention in the Trauma and the Body section, trauma is not something necessarily in the past - traumatic stress may be something we experience ongoingly, and this is evident in all the forms of state violence introduced in the book. Therefore we also need practices and strategies that can support us in navigating traumatic experiences over a lifetime.

In my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course I introduce a framework around collective responses to traumatic stress. This explores the many individual and collective practices that can aid trauma recovery, with plant medicines just being one tool in the toolbox. I've developed some of this framework built on Lisa Fannen's work. She has an amazing book called *Warp and Weft* in which she creates a radical analysis around trauma - the book and an audiobook version are both free online. I've included it in the resources section of this book.

The four stages of trauma recovery are: release, rest and renew, reconnect and resistance.

### **Release**

The release stage is really important. The body, mind and soul are not separate from each other, and they all need to release held trauma, stuck nervous system energy, and emotions like anger and rage. We live in a culture where our feelings are generally very repressed. It's not always safe to be angry. We're constantly dealing with all these huge emotions, and we need to be able to release them in a supportive collective context.

What are some of the practical ways to release? We can express our

emotions in lots of ways: feeling rage on a demo, exercise, or movement, sweating in saunas, bodywork, breathwork and so on. Creative practices, like art, writing or music can be helpful.

There are also trauma releasing exercises, which have been life-changing for me. In some, you hold a position to tire out your own leg muscles and trigger shaking in the body.



It can release trauma that's held in our tissues. There's also brain spotting and Eye Movement, Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) in which you're actively processing traumatic memories.

Predictably, these tools are being appropriated by the state, to reduce the effects of trauma for people in the army who are bombing people, for example, or offering 'mindfulness' workshops to police officers who terrorise populations. In general, I take all these tools with a pinch of salt. We can 'appropriate' their usefulness while acknowledging their roots in colonial medicine and consistently developing our own tools to support our communities. This also means the many healing modalities repressed by colonial medicine.

Plants can also support the release of emotions. Rose or hawthorn can support with grief, for example, as explored in more depth later in this book.

## **Rest**

Surviving and recovering from traumatic experiences can draw on vast amounts of energy. Rest is vital for both coping with what we are going through, as well as processing what has happened. Access to rest, however, is not even, it is highly political and something denied to many in capitalism. There are different types of rest. Physical rest is important, but social rest – time away from people – is too. It's about having time in a more parasympathetic nervous system state where we're able to digest our food properly, and able to relax our

tense muscles, when other vital reparative functions of the body can be enabled. Sleeping and naps, gentle movement, trash TV, pleasurable touch, creativity and so on all have a place. Our most sacred rest is often having nourishing sleep, something that trauma can massively effect. Working with herbs to address sleep disturbances is one of the fundamental steps in trauma recovery, reducing its harm on our bodies and more successfully surviving traumatic stress.

Rest may also be something we do collectively - like hanging out with friends and spending nourishing time together. It can be something that we learn to take more seriously in our projects, collectives and campaigns, for example, designing in time for collective rest, periods of less activity or time off together.

## **Reconnect**

The reconnect stage is all about healing through relationships and recognising that we cannot heal alone. For me as a herbalist, this is all about connecting with the land and non-humans. If you've been going through a lot of traumatic stuff then it might be really difficult for you to feel safe with other people, you might not enjoy socialising, but being on the land can be healing. For me, herbalism isn't just about taking herbs, it's the act of herbalism such as harvesting and medicine making, it's about reconnection and relationship.

We have evolved through relationships. Even if we might resent it sometimes, we actually do really need people. And we also need non-humans. In polyvagal theory, a field that's studying the evolution of the nervous system, there's a concept of 'safe and social' as a nervous system state. We can't get to 'safe and social' on our own, we have to get there with other people. We need relationships in order to heal - they are foundational for trauma recovery (and life in general).

Rituals and ceremonies, developed over millennia, are an important part of reconnection. To integrate what we've been through, we need to share our stories with other people. Trauma recovery is really about tending to our wounds together and deciding what action we can take. If you've been attacked by a bear, you want your village to then protect you and others from that bear. You need them to take action, feel moved by what you said, in order to keep you safe. We need that validation and connection with others to heal.

It's worth noting here that these stages are not necessarily linear. We may bounce between them, and couple them together. The options are endless.



## Resistance

The fourth stage is resistance. Engaging in ways to combat the causes of trauma is really important and can be incredibly therapeutic. I really like a quote from researcher Kathryn A. Becker-Blease which critiques the concept of trauma-informed practices:

*“Just as Dr. King vowed to remain ‘creatively maladjusted’ rather than numb as long as there was discrimination, bigotry, income inequality, militarism, and violence, so might everyone reject those trauma-informed practices that leave individuals well adjusted but inactive in the face of oppression and trauma of all kinds while the individuals and systems that give rise to trauma and oppression operate as usual.”<sup>1</sup>*

The aim of mainstream trauma therapies is for us to adapt to a world that is fundamentally traumatic. A radical response to trauma is to think about how healing and trauma recovery can enable us to become more active. Resistance is not just about ‘fighting the good fight’, it’s also about healing and building liberating forms of collective life.

However, we also need to acknowledge that movement work can be very traumatising in itself. Not only in terms of state repression, but things like

sexual assault, racism, and all kinds of other traumas are also found in our groups and in our movements. Organising and workaholicism can be empowering but can also be avoidant strategies for resolving pain. Anti-capitalists can be workaholics as much as capitalists can and avoiding overwhelming feelings and unprocessed trauma is something we have in common. Being able to organise, to work with other people, takes a huge amount of energy and it needs us to be able to take care of ourselves and each other.



Naimah Thomas, Just Seeds @naimah\_creates

If you're engaged in some sort

of political project or collective it might be interesting to identify the ways in which you have found that work healing. This resistance stage is a vital and commonly missing part of the puzzle and an essential stage of our healing. Our liberation is interconnected and as the saying goes - none are free until all are free.

I explore this framework and each of these stages much more deeply in the *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course but I wanted to share them briefly here so that readers can recognise how important collectivity is in responding to trauma. Capitalism likes to keep us atomised - it tells us that we alone, as individual units, are responsible for our lives and what we may or may not have suffered or been through. It likes to place sole responsibility on the individual for somehow becoming a ‘functioning’ member of society. Yet as this book shows, the forces that are generative of trauma are broad and systematic. Forces much larger than us are continually shaping our lives. With this analysis we can have more self-compassion and we can lean into the ways that we need others (humans and nonhumans) to not only survive a world shaped by several forms of oppression, but also to thrive as we fight back and work together to make new worlds. Or as the Zapatistas say it best, “The world we want is one where many worlds fit”.

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## *Contribution:* **POLYVAGAL THEORY, HERBALISM, RESILIENCY & HEALING**

*Jon Keyes*

Today we are experiencing epidemic levels of anxiety, depression and other forms of mental illness<sup>1</sup>. Researchers have honed in on the usual culprits of stress, poverty, past trauma and oppression. But one scientist named Stephen Porges focused in on how humans process and adapt to severe stress and devised a new concept known as polyvagal theory. This theory shows how humans can engage and help each other to build nervous system resiliency, overcome stressors, and help us heal from trauma and emotional suffering.

### **The Nervous System**

Let's start at the beginning. If you remember back to high school biology class, the nervous system is comprised of the central and peripheral nervous system. The peripheral nervous system is divided up into somatic (voluntary muscle movements) and the autonomic (automatic regulation of systems like the heart and respiration). And the autonomic is divided up into the sympathetic and parasympathetic - the yin and yang of the nervous system.

The sympathetic gets us ready for action via fight or flight, helping us to face predators and other threats. The parasympathetic helps us to stay calm and relaxed and to help us 'rest and digest'. Both the gas and the brake are needed for managing our environment but there is a further evolutionary adaptation that has happened just for mammals - a third way that moves much quicker, and allows us to override the more primitive nervous system responses. This is known as the Social Engagement System and is at the root of how humans attach to their parents, manage stress and can eventually heal from the damaging effects of trauma.

Dr. Stephen Porges is director of the Brain-Body Center at the University of Illinois in Chicago. In 1994, he developed this three part nervous system idea that he called Polyvagal theory. To understand it, let's take a quick look at the vagus nerve.

The vagus is the longest nerve in the body, running from the brainstem down

through the back of the throat and extends through the chest and abdomen, extending its nerve fibers to the heart, the lungs and most of the digestive tract. It consists of a more primitive unmyelinated portion known as the dorsal vagus as well as a more evolutionarily advanced myelinated portion only found in mammals known as the ventral vagus.

The primitive dorsal vagus acts as a shut down mechanism, causing us to freeze or faint when it is activated. You can picture this by remembering those nature videos that show a gazelle fleeing across a plain while a cheetah chases it. At the last second before being attacked, the gazelle stops and lays on the ground in a frozen state. The dorsal vagus has been activated in response to an overwhelming threat. There are two possibilities here - one is that this is a last ditch attempt to throw off a predator by 'playing dead'. Or more likely it is a creature's preparation for overwhelming physical and emotional pain.

Similarly, humans will freeze due to perceived overwhelming threats. At first stress and perceived threats may lead to a sympathetic nervous system response, a hormonal cascade leading to a fight or flight response. But severe trauma like an abusive father or an overwhelming experience like a car accident or violence can cause the dorsal vagus to be activated and a person to freeze and dissociate. This is a nervous system protective mechanism against a severe threat. An individual literally does not have the bandwidth and capacity to manage the horror of the situation and dissociates and freezes. While this is protective, it can become embedded as a neurological pathway and even minor triggers can cause the individual to dissociate as they grow older.

## **Polyvagal Theory**

Now let's examine that third way Porges talked about. The more evolutionarily modern mammalian ventral vagus nerve is connected to important receptors in the eyes, ears and face. Humans pick up on subtle social cues such as eye contact, smiling and vocal intonation to determine safety in a social environment. Porges calls this constant monitoring of our environment for cues about safety 'neuroception'. Receptors in the face pick up these social cues and send signals to the ventral vagus which can then act to calm the heart and nervous system.

Imagine a young child of 18 months old crying out for a parent to come. Perhaps they have just fallen down and scraped their knee. In a healthy environment, a parent will come and soothe the child via eye contact, smiling, and making gentle cooing noises. Those receptors on the face and the ears have received signals that are then transferred to the ventral vagus. The vagus then

sends chemical messengers in the form of acetylcholine to the heart to slow the pace and relax the arteries. This is the social engagement system at work. Instead of going into full fight or flight, or into a freeze state, a parent activates the ventral vagus to override the more primitive nervous system response and help a child feel calm and safe.

Now imagine the other possibility. The child cries out but the parent doesn't come soon, or worse - yells at the kid and does not soothe them. If this happens repeatedly, then the child never learns how to override the primitive response of fight, flight or freeze and becomes stuck in easily returning to those states again and again, even with small triggers.

This is the essence of what happens in developmental trauma. Poor attachment and ongoing abusive environments keep a child locked into an endless cycle of reacting to stressors via fight, flight or freeze. They are unable to easily self-soothe because their nervous system has been trained by neglect or abuse to stay in a heightened stress state.

So Porges is pointing us to this third option known as the Social Engagement System - the idea that human to human face to heart contact could help us avoid the more primitive circuitry to override severe nervous system responses to stress. Here is another example. Imagine you are in a movie theater and suddenly you see a man at the door of the theater acting erratically, yelling and cussing. At first you may start to get extremely anxious and keyed up - the fight or flight sympathetic state, but you look around at your friends and others. Through reading eye contact, facial expressions and hearing a few words, you come to realize that the man is not a threat but just drunk and is being escorted away. Social engagement signals your ventral vagus to send calming signals to the heart to override fight or flight.

Social engagement systems are key to developing a healthy response to stress. They are also key to helping people heal from trauma. A child who did not receive adequate care and love will be challenged to self-soothe and may feel the world is an unsafe place. Trauma as a child can lead to coping strategies that are damaging such as drug and alcohol abuse, addiction, self-injury and suicidal behaviors. Those that are labelled 'borderline' often have experienced childhood trauma. To overcome these embedded neurological pathways, it is key to develop ways of strengthening what is called 'vagal tone'- the ability to stay in a restful parasympathetic state even in the face of adversity.

There are numerous ways that we can strengthen vagal tone, relax the nervous system and utilize techniques to soothe ourselves and build resiliency.

Here are the 5 that I recommend most frequently.

**Breath work** - Focusing on a longer exhalation is key here and I like to use a simple technique of breathing in for four seconds, holding for a second and then breathing out for 8 counts.

**Yoga, Qi Gong and Dance** - All these are ways that improve flow and help move us out of rigid and frozen states to allow the body to flex, extend, open and release.

**Singing and chanting** - The vagal nerve runs from the brainstem down through the back of the throat to the organs. We can stimulate parasympathetic relaxation via stimulating the vagus through singing and chanting. That's why you feel so great after belting out Bohemian Rhapsody at the karaoke party.

**Laughter** - Along with singing and chanting this is the other low hanging fruit of vagal stimulation. Lots of people aren't going to start a yoga practice, but many will watch comedies and dumb movies that make them laugh. That laughter also stimulates the vagus to encourage relaxation.

**Body work** - Massage and acupuncture are both forms of bodywork that help stimulate the vagus and encourage rest and healthy digestion.

But at the core, there is only so much that we can do to self-regulate. Humans are social creatures and healthy relationships are key to our sense of safety, well being and emotional wellbeing. If our relationships are poor, and we are hanging out with people we don't trust, who are emotionally distant or even abusive, it will be next to impossible to heal from the scars and wounds of trauma. To fully heal, we need healthy, trusting relationships and social engagement systems as a way of strengthening this calming ventral vagal pathway. Loving face to face and heart to heart connections are at the core of how we can heal from patterns of fight, flight or freeze.

### **Plants, social bonding and emotional self-regulation**

I want to shift to exploring how the plant world, as well as social engagement and bonding, are key pieces of helping people build resiliency and heal from emotional distress. Let's start with the tree Western Red Cedar. It's a beautiful copper barked evergreen with long sweeping branches and fine articulated aromatic leaves that grows commonly in the Northwest. From building homes to making clothing, utensils, medicines, smudge, baskets and canoes, cedar has long played a central role in the lives of native Northwest peoples. Native peoples spent an enormous amount of time cutting, stripping and carving cedar

into practical everyday tools, clothes, homes and transportation. Imagine small groups of people engaging in this work day in and day out. Social bonding developed as they worked with this tall tree. It became central to their sense of place and social cohesion.

As settlers turned people away from working in multiple ways with cedar towards modern activities such as trapping, logging and then factory and city work, that deep connection and interweaving was damaged, wounded. This one tree was the template for building practical living skills, social engagement and bonding as well as for cultural identity and resiliency.

Today, indigenous tribes from throughout the Northwest gather to engage in ‘Canoe Journeys’. These are gatherings where tribes bring many dozens of canoes built of cedar to paddle and navigate the Northwest waterways. After hundreds of years of colonization, wars, plagues, displacement and forced assimilation, the canoe journeys are a way back, to reconnect to cultural legacies and to each other in shared pride in heritage and a way to strengthen living traditions. The Cedar tree plays a central role here in bringing these indigenous groups together via carved cedar canoes. Greater social resiliency is key to improved mental and physical health. Healing is a group endeavor.

What we are talking about is that plants build resiliency through social engagement and bonding. The most common way that we develop social bonds is around the patterns of meal preparation and gatherings. Traditionally, cultures throughout the world centered meal preparations around the seasons and when particular foraged roots, berries and crops became available. Think of Biblical traditions around the breaking of wheat bread, the consumption of cacao in meso-american societies or the importance of corn and beans to central and north American Indigenous groups. These plants have acted as key agents that help bind us to each other in the shared experience of drinking and eating meals together.

Another way plants help build social bonding is through their power to stimulate, sedate and inebriate. The process of fermenting fruit and grains has brought us cider, wine, beer and mead. Add to that tea, coffee and cannabis and arguably you have the most important plant based social bonding agents on the Earth. And yes they all give a buzz, but they do something greater than that. They are consumed in taverns and bars, tea and coffee houses where people engage with each other - do business, sing karaoke, laugh, play and bond.

In the Polynesian islands, the root of the kava plant is consumed regularly for its sedative and euphoric buzz, in rituals and casual social settings. Kava is

key to relaxing the nervous system to improve openness, and receptivity during social engagement.

Plants can act as mediators to strengthen social bonding in other ways as well. From group hikes in nature to gardening to the Japanese relaxation practice of Forest Bathing, the natural world helps strengthen parasympathetic vagal tone to help us to feel more calm, receptive and socially engaged.

### **Ways that plants act as mediators for social engagement to strengthen vagal tone:**

**Shared meals.** Simply the act of eating together and sharing meals in a harmonious way with positive, trusted friends and allies helps build social engagement pathways that improve vagal tone. This is especially the case if there are particularly cultural foods that are important and act as a hub at feasts, holidays and gatherings.

**Stimulants, relaxants and inebriants.** Yes I know this might be controversial as there can be many side effects and addictive potentials to these plants. But coffee, tea, kava, cacao, beer, wine and ciders made with plants and fruits have long been agents to strengthen social bonding and improve a sense of social safety that can translate into greater vagal tone.

**Cultural keystone plants.** These are plants that are essential to the wellbeing and health of particular societies. They are not easily replaceable and they are used in a variety of important functions. Western Red Cedar was one example. Others include the native use of tobacco, sweetgrass, cacao, copal and sage. In the old world, grapes, olive trees, frankincense, myrrh and many other plants have played a key role in social bonding, cohesion and resiliency.

**Herbs that improve vagal tone.** A number of herbs help improve vagal tone in a variety of ways. From bitter tonics that stimulate the vagus directly, to “nervines” that help to relax the nervous system via neurotransmitter receptors. Think kava, valerian, passionflower and chamomile. A great article on the subject comes via Nikki Darrell called ‘Re-establishing Good Vagal Tone and Balance with Herbs’<sup>29</sup>.

**Gut health.** Along with shared meals with trusted, loving people, there are certain herbs that improve gut health that in turn lead to greater vagal tone. Some herbs act as ‘prebiotics’, feeding healthy bacteria in the gut microbiome. Some include herbs such as burdock and dandelion roots. These healthy bacteria then act to stimulate the vagus to improve parasympathetic relaxation.



## Conclusion

The importance of plants as mediators of social bonding is key to our understanding of how to help people heal who are stuck in maladaptive patterns due to trauma, anxiety and depression. We often think of ourselves as individuals with discrete physical and emotional diseases but in reality we are part of a much larger social and environmental fabric. Poverty, oppression, trauma and social stressors are often the primary cause of illness patterns. Sadness often stems in part from a sense of disconnection and alienation from our families, friends, the land, the seasons and our own good hearts. Polyvagal theory teaches us that we can overcome this sense of disconnection that leads to poor emotional self-regulation by paying attention to the importance of human to human, heart to heart engagement and bonding. Plants can act as those mediators that bring us back into greater connection and emotional wellbeing.

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*[www.Hearthsidehealing.com](http://www.Hearthsidehealing.com). You can find the original article, links and resources at: <https://www.hearthsidehealing.com/articles/polyvagal-theory-herbalism-resiliency-and-healing>*

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## *Contribution:* THE FLOWER OF YOUR HEART: PLANT IMAGINATION

*Steffi - LA ALKIMILA*

For diverse reasons, especially when enduring state violence and repression, we might not have access to (certain) plants or herbal remedies. Sometimes we can't use the plants we feel drawn to because of contraindications or allergies. In such situations, we can still be with and make friends with plants, get to know them, interact and perceive them with all our senses. Imprisoned, under surveillance or bedridden, however, we might neither have access to places where we could literally sit with a specific living plant. With these realities in mind, I would like to contribute to this book with plant imagination as a form of sensory herbalism that can be practiced in many different situations and spaces, in presence or absence of a plant (remedy), and with a variety of intentions. All we need is our imagination, which doesn't make this practice easy or less effective – plant imagination is not only about evoking mental images but about the somatic effects of imagining, and just like any other way of self-/co-regulation, plant imagination might need some practice.

*“Never forget this: your body does not end at the skin. Your contours are not constrained by physical appearance. Your morphological imaginary is fluid and changeable. Indeed, your tissues can absorb all kinds of fantasies. Your imagination generates more than mere mental images; its reach extends through your entire sensorium. Simultaneously visual and kinesthetic, imaginings carry an affective charge. They can excite your muscles, tissues, and fascia, heighten or alter your senses. You can fold semiosis into sensation. Perceptual experiments can rearticulate your sensorium. And by imagining otherwise, and telling different stories, you can open up new sensible worlds.”*

- Natasha Myers, Sensing Botanical Sensoria. A Kriya for Cultivating Your Inner Plant<sup>1</sup>

A plant imagination could be similar to an encounter with a living plant in the woods, the garden or your living room. You get yourself comfortable (whatever that means for you) and when you feel ready, you start to evoke the mental image

of a plant. That is, you invite a plant to show up for you, to exchange energies with you, to nourish you, to help you calm down, to be here with you. When your inner eye sees the plant, you start to observe their form, colours, roots, stem, leave, flowers... Imagine getting closer, ask permission to touch and smell the plant, sit with them, talk to them, breathe with them; whatever comes up for you. You can stay with the plant and enjoy their company as long as you want.

Before you come back to the here and now, don't forget to say goodbye. You can thank the plant for showing up, for being with you, for sharing sensations and information. And you can always come back to meet them. You might imagine a plant you have been reading about in this book, one you have always felt drawn to, or a completely fictive one: everything is fine, it is your imagination and there is no limits to it. Through imagination we can even experience what it's like to to 'vegetate like a plant', that is, we can 'waken our latent inner plant' through 'vegetalising' our sensory perception: imagine roots dropping out of your feet (or other body parts) to earth, feel how the nourishing water enters your body and circulates through it, sense the play of air across your imaginary leaves, and imagine absorbing sunlight to produce fresh energy.

### **The Flower of Your Heart**

This particular plant imagination is an invitation to enter our heart spaces. It can help to mitigate stress as we bring our perception from mind to heart. As Asia Suler (One Willow Apothecaries) has beautifully put it: "The heart transform stress into resonance." The heart is intimately connected to our central nervous system. It is one of the first body parts with which we perceive external energies: those we want and need, and those that our hearts can't stand. Even so-called Western sciences now state that more neuronal impulses are sent from heart to brain than from brain to heart.

In everyday language, we often talk about the need to open our hearts. Yet, it is equally important to know how and when to close this door. Connecting with The Flower of Your Heart is a way to train both the opening of the heart, as well as the setting of protective boundaries. One – if not the – flowering plant directly connected to the heart is rose. Given their medicinal properties, rose remedies are prescribed in case of high arterial pressure and circulatory deficiencies, as soft antidepressants, for anxieties, to soothe and protect the heart... With their soft aromatic petals and their sharp thorns, roses are closely connected to self-love and boundaries. Before engaging in The Flower of Your Heart practice, I love to put some rose hydrosol on my skin, or to drink a cup of hot or cold

infusion of wild rose petals. And I love to invite rose to be the imaginary flower of my heart. However, any realistic or fictive plant that appears for you is just perfect: it is your imagination and the flower of your heart.

Get yourself comfortable in whatever way you want: standing, sitting or lying down, with your eyes closed or looking downwards to minimise external visual influences if you are a sighted person. If possible, you can stretch your legs and arms: hold the tension for a few seconds, and then release. Start to consciously perceive the contours of your body and its contact with the surface where you are sitting or lying down. Take your time to settle in your body, to be present with yourself and the energy of your breath. When you feel comfortable enough, bring your attention to the part of your body where your heart is. Gently put your hand(s) there. Breathe into your heart space for a minute or so, slowly bringing perception down from mind to heart, caressing your heart with your breath and hand(s).

Now, imagine a rose (or any other flower) with the petals still closed in your heart space. Observe the shape and colours of the flower. You may also want to gently touch the closed petals to sense their texture. Do you know the smell of this flower? Can you remember it? Can you smell it right now? Take your time to get in contact with the flower of your heart. Then, the flower begins to open, petal by petal, releasing a coloured energy to the area of your heart and, if it feels comfortable, also beyond that: to other areas of your body, to the surface on which you are sitting or lying, to your room, or even beyond. And if your imagination wants to keep the coloured energy inside your body - even just in your heart space - that is totally fine. You might also want to talk to the flower or ask a question. The answer may be expressed with words or images, maybe you sense a physical sensation. Try to flow with your imagination and enjoy the experience of being in contact with the flower of your heart.

When you feel ready to finish the practice, say goodbye to the flower, appreciate the company, the information and sensations that you have exchanged. Then the petals start to close again, up to where you want them to. Before leaving, you still want to create a safe space for the flower of your heart, inside or outside your body, where they will be protected until you come back to them. If you have extended the colourful energy beyond your body, bring it back inside or to the distance that feels most comfortable for you. Consciously perceive the contours of your body and the contact with the surface again. Gently open your eyes and start to look around, stretch or move. Bring your attention back to the present moment, to the here and now. It is just fine if you are thinking and moving a bit



slower right after this practice. Take the time you need to process what you have experienced, to sense the explicit and subtle transformations, to rest.

Important note: ‘mindfulness can go wrong’.<sup>2</sup> The term mindfulness is often used to describe and promote stress-reducing practices and relaxation. I agree with Mark Redwood who suggests that a better way to understand mindfulness might be to consider that it opens a door to different physical, mental and emotional patterns. The same is true for visualisation practices and plant imagination, as it includes some kind of intentional dissociation where some elements of full perception are faded out (e.g. external visual perception) as we dive into the inner life of our bodies and mental images. Relaxation is one possible effect, but it is important to know that other experiences can pass through the door of mindfulness/imagination, too, including anxiety, panic, trauma. There are practices that ensure you stay focused on the here and now, the space where you are, the movements you are doing, the things you are touching, seeing or hearing. Such focus on the present moment can help to get back a sense of control.

Please practise plant imagination with tenderness and compassion for yourself and others. Be curious, and try not to set yourself any goals before you start: there is not one way of doing or experiencing plant imagination. You can’t fail in doing the practice, many things can happen, everything is valid

and important, and even the non-appearance of images/sensations carries information. Make sure to observe yourself, to perceive your overall feelings, as well as the slight changes in breath, physical sensation, emotions, thoughts... Try not to force anything. If you don't feel comfortable, open your eyes, look around, start to move, do whatever you need to do to feel more comfortable. There are different ways to leave imagination exercises or to put mental images at a safer distance: counting from zero to five or from five to zero before opening your eyes; transforming mental images into paintings or photographs that you can observe from a distance; etc. You may want to think about such a method before you start practising. You are the one who decides when to finish the practice and you can always give it another try at some other timespace.

*Text: Steffi - LA ALKIMILA - Re/creación feminista\* con cuerpos & palabras, plantas & imágenes. [www.alkimila.com](http://www.alkimila.com). IG: @la\_alkimila*

*Image: Irene Lasivita; visual artist living and working in Buenos Aires. Her images record our ties to non-human subjects and attempt to weave a bridge between worlds that are only seemingly distant. [www.irenelasivita.com.ar](http://www.irenelasivita.com.ar) IG: @irenelasivita*

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# PART 2:

# STATE REPRESSION

## INTRODUCTION TO STATE REPRESSION

*“Whenever we seriously threaten the state and capital, they will turn on us with extreme force; from the outset we need to build the capacity and skills for combat. To support our struggle, and to support life, we need to create our networks of care.”*

- Shahin, *Nietzsche and Anarchy. Psychology for free spirits, ontology for social war*

In this section of the book I give some insight into some of the tactics of state repression and where herbal solidarity is an option to support people's bodies and nervous systems as they endure and try to resist whatever the state has in store for them. One definition of repression is that it is the process by which *“the dominant hegemonic order attempts to maintain power by destroying, rendering harmless or appeasing those organisations, people, groups, or ideologies that potentially threaten their position of power or privilege”*<sup>1</sup>. Hegemonic in simple terms means the powers that have dominance.

For anyone involved in any kind of social struggle, you will see state repression in practice - heavy policing on demonstrations, character assassination in the media, lengthy court cases and prison sentences, new laws and legislation to criminalise whatever campaign is in the headlines.

As with all subjects covered in the book, how this violence is distributed is racialised, classed and gendered and intersects with other forms of oppression. State repression also operates to different extents and with different state tactics around the world. In Russia, political dissidents may be hung upside down and tortured with cattle prods. In Iran, women organisers may be raped and burned by police and their proxies. In Mexico, people may be murdered and disappeared. In Spain, people may be imprisoned far from their families for decades. Wherever there is a state or a group of people trying to maintain power through force, they will respond with violence and repression whenever that power is threatened.

Unfortunately, many social movements commonly have a kind of amnesia, not learning from history or remembering the generations before them that suffered repression at the hands of the state. Anyone organising for social change needs to be versed in the tactics of repression in whatever territory they live and organise in. For someone involved in anti-repression work, I regularly



see groups and campaigns fall by the wayside, almost shocked that they've been arrested or that the state has been planning operations against them. Even if you use 'legal' tactics or 'peaceful protests', if you threaten power in any way, you will attract repression. Therefore developing infrastructure is vital. Whether this is a local Anarchist Black Cross chapter that can support people in prison, or groups offering know-your rights training for street actions, security culture guidance, computer security or media training. Anti-repression action comes in many forms and can build movements with greater resilience to inevitable state repression.

### **My experiences of repression**

Growing up in a very macho animal liberation movement, it was extremely taboo to talk about the social, emotional, or bodily impacts of repression. Whatever we were going through was 'nothing compared to the animals' and showing we were somehow being harmed was like awarding the state with a victory. Yet over the years, I saw the shock and impact of years of ongoing repression take its toll on even the most dedicated and defiant of organisers.

The state effectively crushed our campaign to close down Europe's largest animal testing company. I learnt that a small group of people can achieve a lot, but ultimately, we will always come up against the power of the state. This is why I'm an anarchist - I know that it will take an entire social revolution to challenge that kind of state power. Individuals, targeted campaigns and collectives can be crushed but whole movements, or entire populations of resistance, are harder to break. Likewise the commitment and vision of liberation remains strong in people's hearts despite many decades of state repression.

My own experiences would have been radically different with organised political and social support. Now that I'm organising support for others, it amazes me that I went through most of the repression I experienced alone, especially before prison. No one collected me at the police station, no one organised a support group, no fundraising or donations after my livelihood and home were smashed to bits, no help with understanding all the legal paperwork, no political solidarity (instead the opposite - a lot of hostility that our campaign had attracted the repression and we were, through our militancy, to blame). Lack of support is a common dynamic that makes experiences more traumatising.

## **So, what happened?**

Back in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s the animal liberation movement in the UK was thriving. Breeders of laboratory animals were being shut down left, right and centre through grassroots campaigns and direct action. People were sabotaging fox hunts en masse, the fur industry was destroyed through raids. The Animal Liberation Front was in full effect. It was accepted that prison was inevitable for people in the movement, and many people moved in and out of prison on generally shorter (although sometimes longer) sentences.

It felt like the power was on our side somehow - the police and state couldn't keep up with this wild grassroots movement and the phenomenal public support behind it.

I started my first animal rights group when I was ten years old at school. I spent my weekends, scrambling my bus fare together from my paper round to get to Bristol (the nearest city) and get a lift to local and national demonstrations. I saw people tear down fences on demos, police charge at us on horses, and friends have their ribs cracked by police attacks, right in front of my eyes.

As I grew up, and policing became heavier, I saw tactics change to shorter and faster, mobile demos and more covering up of faces and anonymity. Aboveground actions were pushed into a more underground style and the security risks blurred between them. By the time I was sixteen years old, my first boyfriend went to prison after a home demonstration. At seventeen years old, my next boyfriend was sentenced to a year for affray after an altercation with some foxhunters. It became absolute normality for friends and loved ones to be in prison and prison visits, calls and letter writing became a regular part of my week. I got my own house raided for the first time at seventeen, laughing it off as part of the macho environment the movement raised me in.

When I was just nineteen years old, the police smashed through my door on 'the big charge'. In May 2007, the police raided more than thirty-two houses in an operation that targeted Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, the grassroots campaign to close down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), Europe's largest animal testing company that murdered over two hundred thousand animals every year. This was one chapter in a wave of organised state repression that lasted over ten years.

The charge was conspiracy to blackmail which means 'making unwarranted demands with the threat of menaces'. The premise of the charge was that because HLS is a legal company our demands for people to cease trading with them were 'unwarranted' and the 'menaces' were the tactics we were using that

included phone calls and emails, to demonstrations, to property damage.

On a personal level, the police destroyed the house my ex and I were renting in the valleys of South Wales, smashing up the bannister, breaking the bath and pulling up the carpets. The landlord saw us on TV and kicked us out. I came out of the police station alone, while my ex was held longer, and found that our foster dog hadn't been taken into kennels like the police said they would do and instead he was left alone in the kitchen with no food or water shaking when I found him. His response to loud noises, his changed temperament and tendency to cower and shake for months afterwards, taught me a lesson in traumatic stress and how non-human animals can show us the impact of an experience more obviously than we can observe it in ourselves.

Three others were directly remanded to prison while the rest of the group had strict bail conditions not allowing us to speak to our friends, publish content on the internet, and all kinds of other legalistic restrictions. Court dates were constantly pushed back over and over again, leading to constant uncertainty and stress. Two years of court hearings ensued then finally a major trial where everyone was found guilty of conspiracy to blackmail. The state got what they wanted. Eventually twelve of us were in prison, with the longest sentence being eleven years. I received three and half.

As I share more in the prison section of this book, I went to prison as a twenty-one year old and served just under two years in total. Despite many people in the movement saying we should "treat prison like a holiday", in all honesty, it was violent and traumatising and one of the most dehumanising experiences of my life.

But the repression was not over on release from prison. In England you have a 'licence' which means if you are released from prison early (generally half way through your sentence but it's not guaranteed and depends on the length and type of your sentence) you will have a set of conditions you have to adhere to otherwise you will be recalled back to prison. These conditions vary from living at a certain address to not having intimate relationships without permission. Due to the political nature of our case, I had a ream of conditions about "not interacting with anyone concerned with animal welfare". Overnight, I was not allowed to speak to nearly all of my friends for fear of going back to prison and this lasted for nearly two years. The loneliness was designed to make us 'prosocial' again and disconnect us from political struggles. It was incredibly effective at ensuring most people in the case did not return to grassroots organising.

We were also given ASBOs - anti-social behaviour orders - a repressive

mechanism developed to target working-class communities to restrict their ‘anti-social’ behaviour, such as drinking in parks. In our case, if we campaigned around vivisection again, we would face up to five years in prison. Three people from the campaign were given life-long ASBOs. This ASBO was triggered when we were released from prison, which meant by the time it was over, we had been living with these restrictions for over a decade, where returning to prison had been constantly held over our heads.

### **The many tactics of state repression**

It wasn’t until we somehow emerged from the personal fallout of repression, that it became possible to really grasp the bigger picture of what had been happening in the movement. We were on the crest of a wave of intensified repression.

It wasn’t just the mass arrests, house raids, prison sentences or physical violence on demonstrations and mass policing efforts - we’d learnt the state had spent £2.1 million on the operation to end the campaign, including putting twelve of us under surveillance for nearly two years beforehand. The murky world of undercover informants, relationship sabotage, and media slander also came to light. New legislation specifically targeting campaigns against animal testing had been enacted in law which would be used to later target groups that dared to still challenge vivisection. An entire police unit, the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit (NETCU) had been developed specifically to influence the media with press releases documenting the campaign in an effort to persuade the public that our actions were rooted in ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’.

### **The personal impacts of repression**

*“The state treats delinquents en masse as a social danger, but demolishes them one by one.”*

- Os cangaceiros, *A crime called freedom*

In my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course there is a module all about trauma and common trauma dynamics. These explore what can make an experience particularly traumatising, or more traumatising.

Loneliness, isolation, and lack of support are some of the largest factors. Through repression, it was the lack of support that carried the biggest weight for me - I felt betrayed, lost and alone. There was no one at the police station waiting for me on release, there was no organised support group that could help

with fundraising or actions outside court. Living on benefits without a safety net or a family with money, meant that every time there was a court appearance it was literally a choice between travel expenses and eating that week. It was enormously stressful to manage the fear and anxiety of thinking I was going to get twelve years in prison (the sentence others had received in a previous blackmail case). I left home at sixteen and didn't finish formal education or A-levels at college. I'm also dyslexic and legal work feels incredibly intimidating. I had no idea how to approach the folders and boxes worth of case papers and legal paperwork. I didn't know what to advocate for with the solicitors or how the whole thing worked.

People told us they were "scared to be associated" with us. They were afraid to be pulled into the web of repression. This is why no one called to check if my partner or I were okay. The feeling of betrayal still flows through me and it's hard to feel any political affinity with the animal liberation movement after these experiences. People blamed us for bringing the repression on ourselves, that we 'went too far', that it was our fault that the whole movement had been impacted. Even within the group of defendants, we were legally disallowed from communicating with each other, which compounded the isolation and led to dirty tactics like defendants distancing themselves from you to achieve shorter sentences. Overall, it was a shit show.

And what did this all create? It led to the destruction of many relationships. It highly impacted my nervous system leading to years of constant fight or flight and activation that was hard to unravel. Prison itself caused me to develop PTSD and being haunted by nightmares and intrusive thoughts and flashbacks for many years before being able to access treatment and support. I developed chronic health issues and a vivid understanding of how trauma shapes the body. These experiences were all on top of a very challenging childhood with many of the trauma dynamics repeating themselves. Ultimately, it created a feeling of loneliness and alienation socially, emotionally and politically for many years before I was able to process, integrate and heal from these experiences, mostly by throwing myself into anti-repression efforts to make sure no-one felt alone like I and others had at that time.

### **The movement effects of repression**

While I often speak about the importance of anti-repression work because of the traumatic impacts of repression on the individual, a bigger purpose to it all is because repression takes its toll on what we are trying to achieve as movements.

In our case, it meant that the murderous vicinity that was HLS remained open and the animals continued to be tortured. For other campaigns, it may mean that sacred mountains get destroyed, prisons get built or people get deported. Whatever we are fighting for, repression aims to render us ineffective. It aims to not only prevent groups from achieving their goals but commonly carries the aim to completely destroy or end groups, campaigns and movements. In our case, we later learned that the police called it ‘leadership decapitation’. They wanted to cut the head off of our movement, which tells you something about the violence of their actions.

Repression creates a broad culture of fear and can commonly lead to the pacification of movement tactics. For example, this may involve the co-optation of militant tactics and radical visions for change into more legalistic forms of organising. This may involve funnelling energy into parliamentary ‘democracy’ and lobbying, or even the focus on consumer choices and corporate relationships, as happened with radical veganism - which was one very intersectional and focused on direct action, and eventually evolved into ‘green capitalism’ whereby the focus is less on what we do and more on what we buy. Energies may also be co-opted into what is known as the ‘not for profit industrial complex’ (NPIC). The group INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence published the book *The Revolution will not be Funded* in 2017 exploring the NPIC and how political goals are often co-opted to serve government, grantmaking and foundation interests. Instead of building movements, the focus shifts to building non-governmental organisations. I’d highly encourage anyone involved in social change work of different kinds to read the book and explore these tensions.

Likewise, repression leads to the destruction of relationships and the loss of comrades. People step back from organising either through fear or lack of support. They burn out and drop out, disappearing from movements due to trauma and chronic health issues and a general lack of collective care. We can never build powerful movements for change if we fail to take care of each other and leave people behind. Herbalism is a beautiful offering to help tend to people’s frightened hearts, exhausted bodies and fractured spirits when they are enduring repression. This is what this part of the book explores.

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## POLICE RAIDS & HERBAL ALLIES FOR SHOCK

A police raid is an unexpected visit by police with the aim of using the element of surprise to seize 'evidence' or arrest 'suspects'. There can be many different kinds and they will obviously vary across countries. Commonly they are around dawn when people are still sleeping, however, they can happen at any time of day. There may be anything from a small group of officers to a massive group of armed police.

Most raids usually involve an arrest at the beginning - a grabbing and handcuffing of a suspect before they're able to move or escape. Other raids are more like house searches where there is a warrant, meaning police can search the property even if they may not actually have enough evidence to justify an arrest at that moment.

During a raid, items may be taken. While there is meant to be all kinds of legislation regarding what they are legally allowed to take and why, in my experience it's an absolute free for all. Even if items are eventually returned, the goal is to cause as much inconvenience as possible to the person being raided. Whatever tactics are used, raids are meant to intimidate.

The element of surprise creates a feeling of shock in the body. Having police break up your house, smashing a door, breaking furniture, tipping food all over the floor looking for things are all meant to create fear and leave you feeling violated. Houses aren't homes for everyone and I don't want to assume that everyone experiences a sense of safety, but for many people, a house raid is enough to permanently change how you feel in a space. It can take away the feeling that a room or building is safe and cosy, and instead create a constant feeling of unease.

The fear of being raided again takes its toll. Many people I know who've been raided, still commonly jump if they hear any kind of noise around dawn. Many people struggle to sleep for months afterwards and many people simply find they have to move house in order to get away from the energy and memories of being stormed by police.

## **What roles can herbs play?**

Obviously, if you've just been arrested, you're not exactly going to be able to just pop open your tincture bottle and take a few drops! But the feeling of shock remains beyond the initial moments, and herbal support can play a role in this arrest after-care. Likewise, burning herbs may help cleanse a space of the 'energies' of the police or the feelings you have leftover after their presence has been in your space. As detailed in many chapters of this book, herbs can also support nightmares, symptoms of post traumatic stress and general recovery from trauma.

## **Understanding Emotional Shock**

I've used the framework for emotional shock to differentiate from medical shock, a critical condition brought on by the sudden drop in blood flow through the body. This kind of shock may result from trauma, heatstroke, blood loss or an allergic reaction. It can also result from severe infection, poisoning, severe burns or other causes<sup>1</sup>.

Emotional shock is a completely understandable response to an experience that has literally shaken us. Emotional shock demands an acute activation of the sympathetic nervous system, the body's fight or flight response which can mean an increased heart rate, tightness in the chest, breathlessness, lightheadedness, dizziness, headache, muscle tension, nausea and many other physical symptoms (as detailed further in the trauma and the body section). We may be acutely activated with a feeling of panic, rage, anger and anxiety. Or we may be stuck in an immobilised state, such as feeling numb, dissociated or shut down, experiencing difficulty in expressing our emotions at all.

Shock can last anything from several minutes to several days with an aftermath of weeks, months or years of post-traumatic stress depending on the context.

## **Emotional Shock Aftercare**

Here are some tips for taking care of loved ones who have been raided or for taking care of yourself:

- Ground in whatever way supports you e.g. walking or sitting outside, getting under a duvet, cuddling a companion animal, breathing techniques etc.
- Eat! Eat root vegetables, fatty foods, anything that brings you comfort (I



love carbs in these situations!)

- Surround yourself by supportive people
- Stay somewhere else, if you can, so that you can get some quality sleep before processing the effects of the raid on your home

### **Herbal Support for Emotional Shock**

Any herb can provide support for emotional shock if you already have an existing relationship with a plant medicine that helps ground you, soothes your nervous system or simply helps you feel more steady in the world. These are just some of the herbs that would be my personal first point of call:

**Lavender**, *Lavandula angustifolia* - a wonderful calming gentle relaxant. I love lavender because it's very accessible, even a reasonably high quality bottle of the essential oil can be affordable. I make infused lavender oil that is different from the highly concentrated essential oil. It is wonderful rubbed into temples and aching muscles from stressed-out tension. Lavender can also be found in many people's gardens - I've lost count of the times I've been out and about feeling stressed, only to pinch a little bit off a bush somewhere to smell as I try to move through the day in a calmer way. You can also infuse just a couple of flowers in hot water for an instant calming tea. Lavender oil used externally can support people experiencing disturbances in their sleep following a raid.

**Chamomile**, *Matricaria chamomilla* - a generally accessible herb - you may even be able to get the tea in the police station itself! Or at a petrol garage on the way home. Chamomile tea is instantly calming, especially for people whose guts seem to be the first thing affected by stress. Chamomile is also wonderful as a tincture and warm-infused glycerite.

**Lemon Balm**, *Melissa officinalis* - such a grounding, calming, gentle relaxant herb. It has an instant effect on the nervous system reducing sympathetic activation. You can have fresh lemon balm tea or take it as a tincture. Lemon balm makes a wonderful cold-infused glycerite.

**Hawthorn**, *Crataegus monogyna* - a gentle relaxant on the whole system. Hawthorn has an affinity for the cardiovascular system, so if you're struggling after a raid with a feeling of panic in your chest, or heart palpitations, I'd

strongly recommend hawthorn. It's also a traditional remedy for grief, fear and worry, that all accompany police raids. Hawthorn (berry or flower, or both) is wonderful as a tea, tincture and glycerite (warm and cold infused methods).

**Motherwort**, *Leonurus cardiaca* - is a nervous system relaxant particularly indicated where there is anxiety in the chest including heart palpitations. It's fantastic as a tincture but can also be taken as a tea.



*Skullcap*

**Rose**, *Rosa spp* - a very gentle relaxant that offers soothing to the physical and emotional heart. Rose can be very comforting in times of shock and grief. Sweetness as a flavour is nourishing to the nervous system, especially after acute activation of the fight or flight response (which is commonly why we crave sweet things when stressed). Rose glycerite is heavenly in its sweetness and the comfort it brings. If you've been trying not to cry after an arrest or raid, rose will gently open up your heart to support with emotional release.

**Milky Oats**, *Avena sativa* - Milky oats are generally taken as a nervous system tonic over the long haul to support stressed and depleted nervous systems. I'd usually include milky oats in a long-term blend if someone was experiencing ongoing repression, but if you have it to hand it will definitely bring comfort during emotional shock.

**Passionflower**, *Passiflora incarnata* - Passionflower is my go-to medicine to support someone struggling to sleep after a house raid. This is because passionflower has a direct sedating effect on the nervous system, making it a great port of call for someone needing help with falling asleep. Its qualities also make it effective during the daytime if someone is acutely activated especially as part of blends. Passionflower is great for racing thoughts - if you are intensely scanning for noises, suspicious of further arrests and raids or simply exhausted and consumed with what has recently happened.

**Skullcap**, *Scutellaria lateriflora* - Skullcap is a wonderful hypnotic nervine that acts as a general relaxant and sedative, especially on the musculoskeletal system. While its tonic effects are supportive longer term, I also find it helpful in cases of acute stress and emotional shock. (See more about skullcap in the herbal support for panic attacks section, as well as its plant profile at the back of the book).

**Valerian**, *Valeriana officinalis* - Valerian was used in the First World War to treat soldiers experiencing shell shock. It is useful as a sedative and relaxant and effective for many people in soothing anxiety. It is worth noting that some people may have the opposite effect taking valerian and find themselves more agitated and often with increased nightmares and disturbing dreams. However, for most people, it is very supportive to help soothe the nervous system during emotional shock (see more about valerian in the *herbal support for panic attacks* section).



*Valerian*

**Wild Lettuce**, *Lactuca virosa* - Wild Lettuce is a stronger sedative that may be appropriate when other herbs such as lavender or passionflower are not ‘doing the job’ in terms of supporting someone to get to sleep. I’ve worked with wild lettuce during times of acute distress and emotional shock following a traumatic bereavement. In my experience it has a more instantaneous effect when supporting someone who needs to sleep following trauma.

### **Burning herbs**

People have been burning herbs over millennia as part of rituals to cleanse spaces, objects and for other spiritual and practical means (such as burning bundles of thyme in hospitals during infectious disease outbreaks).

Unfortunately, several herbs have fallen victim to capitalist commodification. The exploitation and packaging of Indigenous herbs from different lineages to sell globally has led to the threatened existence of species such as White Sage, *Salvia apiana*. I strongly encourage people to research the practices of burning

herbs in their own lineages and bioregions. For those of us sharing lineages from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, there are many beautiful herbs that have been used in different ways in practices of burning bundles. These include:

- Sage (Garden sage)
- Rosemary
- Lavender
- Rose Petals
- Mugwort
- Cedar
- Juniper
- Elderberry
- And many others!



You can tie together a bundle of dried herbs, light the ends and move around your space to help cleanse it with the smoke. Please use common sense and take care of everything in terms of fire safety!

## References

1. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-shock/basics/art-20056620>

## HERBAL SUPPORT FOR PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks can be extremely difficult and debilitating. If you are experiencing them regularly, then please know that I'm sending a lot of love and solidarity to you because I know how challenging they can be.

In really simple terms, panic attacks are surges of intense anxiety and fear. Our body may be experiencing distress and expressing it through, for example, an increased heart rate and rapid and shallow breathing. We may get to a point where we're actually struggling to breathe and we're starting to hyperventilate. People often get chest pain, experience shaking or trembling, and can get very sweaty. There can be a feeling of dizziness or light-headedness, nausea, or vomiting. In general, there's a feeling that we're losing control, 'going crazy' or about to die. We may feel like we're detached from our own body.

After a panic attack, we might experience tingling or numbness as well. We can have this feeling of being hungover due to the surge in stress hormones and all these physiological changes that have been activated. This hangover feeling can linger for the rest of the day or several days.

### **What roles can plant medicines play in preventing and treating panic attacks?**

You might be thinking, 'just give me the list of plants and I'll make a mix and that will help'. There are certainly mixes that are really fantastic for acute situations, but I want to focus also on preventing panic attacks and supporting our nervous system so that we don't get into this state of fear and panic.

Panic attacks are an acute activation of our sympathetic nervous system and are the result of cumulative activation in our nervous system. They come from a build-up of anxiety, pressure, and tension. They can feel like the straw that broke the camel's back; an absolute last resort when you've hit your limit.

So for example, I might have a really difficult day with lots of stressful things happening - lots of calls and messages for example. One of my main triggers is the prison system, so it will be someone texting me "Oh, this guy's getting tortured. Can you share this action alert?" or I'll get a phone call from a friend in prison. My nervous system gets overwhelmed because I haven't had time to

process and integrate what's happening. I haven't had enough parasympathetic time to rest and digest. My nervous system is at peak capacity, and it all adds up until there's some kind of final trigger and then I get a panic attack. I feel like I can't cope anymore. The world feels too threatening. I think I'm going to die. It's really that intense.

### **Preventing panic attacks**

To prevent panic attacks, we have to reduce this activation of our sympathetic nervous system. There's a million and one ways to do this. Being with friends that we trust and feel safe with, being with animals, watching light-hearted or trashy TV shows, engaging in an activity that we find restful, like gardening, or walking somewhere beautiful and relaxing. These activities can all really help us move into a parasympathetic state.

It's an essential state for the body. This is when our muscles relax, our blood pressure reduces, our tissues get a chance to repair themselves and our digestion has an adequate flow of blood and enzymes. Generally, this state is where we feel 'safe and social'. It's not always easy to access this state especially if being in fight or flight or being very activated has been a dominant pattern in our life experience. Plant medicines can be amazing teachers and gentle guides for tending to our nervous systems and helping us inhabit different ways of being that are less about survival and danger and more about feeling safe and social. Nervines especially can be amazing in this respect (see the section on nervines in part one).

### **Herbal support during a panic attack**

Now let's look at herbal support during a panic attack. What can you take in that moment to help calm you down?

For me, all plants that you have a relationship with can support you in a panic attack. If you have a relationship with a plant and taking that plant makes you feel safe, calm, supported, and strengthened then I think those are the herbs that you want to be reaching towards during a panic attack. There are also some go-tos that herbalists often recommend.

#### **Motherwort, *Leonurus cardiaca***

This herb is very strongly indicated for panic attacks - it has an affinity with the chest particularly. Whether that's easing a sensation of rising anxiety in the

chest or literally helping to reduce heart palpitations, motherwort can bring an instant relief through its strong, relaxing action. Motherwort is a herb that reminds you to breathe. It has cardiotonic properties which are really useful in treating high blood pressure. And it's got so many other amazing medicinal actions. It's definitely my number one herb for panic attack blends.

Generally, it's recommended as a tincture, which is an alcohol-based medicine, and not everyone can consume alcohol. I haven't tried making a glycerite of motherwort, but I'm sure it can be done. I've found it very effective in drop doses, so during a panic attack, taking fifteen drops, directly on my tongue or having it in some water.

And here's a quote from the famous herbalist, Nicholas Culpepper, who said, "*There is no better herb to drive melancholy vapors from the heart to strengthen it and make a merry cheerful blind soul than this herb. Therefore, the Latins called it Cardiaca.*"

A safety note: avoid Motherwort during pregnancy due to its emmenagogue action (that stimulates menstruation).



### **Lemon Balm, *Melissa officinalis***

I'm such a Lemon Balm drug dealer. In my experience it's the most beautiful, safe, and wonderful herb that just seems to benefit everyone who takes it. During a panic attack itself, having a swig of Lemon Balm goes a long way to help me feel soothed and calmer.

It has this wonderful, fast-acting, relaxing action, which is what we need during a panic attack.

It's a wonderful nervine relaxant that can help us move into a more parasympathetic state. Its volatile oils act directly on the limbic system, which is the part of the brain involved in our behavioural and emotional responses.

It can reduce tension through

lowering blood pressure and can relieve heart palpitations. And lemon balm is fantastic for people who express a lot of distress in their digestive system. If you're that person who gets irritable bowel symptoms when you're experiencing a lot of emotional stress, then lemon balm is a fantastic ally because it has a lot of affinity with that gut-brain-axis stuff (explored brilliantly in the section on *Trauma, the Gut and Healing: Building Deep Resiliency with Herbs* later in this chapter).

In my experience, lemon balm is amazing as a glycerite. A glycerite is when a medicinal substance is combined with glycerine. It captures the volatile oils really well and it's much stronger and sweeter than a tincture. Not everyone can consume alcohol-based medicines and we need to be able to make medicines that can support people who are pregnant, who maybe avoid alcohol for health reasons, children, the elderly, for example or for religious reasons.

Lemon balm is also a wonderful tincture. The tea in the summer from fresh leaves is absolutely beautiful. It's generally avoided during pregnancy, in the first trimester, but otherwise I think it's pretty safe. Be careful with low blood pressure, antidepressants, and sedative medications. I've never found anyone that already had low blood pressure which got worse from taking lemon balm but it's often listed in the herbal safety manuals.

### **Passionflower**, *Passiflora incarnata*

Passionflower is famous for being a fantastic ally for sleep disturbances and insomnia. Sometimes herbs get pigeonholed a bit and passionflower has often been seen only in this night-time, sleep-support category but I think it's very underestimated as a nervine. It's fantastic in daytime blends to support with reducing sympathetic activation.

Unless someone was severely hyper-aroused or triggered, I probably wouldn't give it on its own in the daytime. A little bit goes a long way, especially in combination with other nervines. For people who are experiencing strong baseline anxiety it can be helpful as passionflower can help ease anxiety and racing thoughts. Racing thoughts are interesting. A person might be in a particular kind of thought loop of feeling in danger, for example, and then that can build towards a panic attack.

Passionflower is fantastic at addressing that. It's also an antispasmodic, so it's indicated for muscle pain and digestive distress or period pains. It can reduce blood pressure and has a relaxant effect on the entire body.

In terms of medicine forms, it's recommended as a tincture or as a glycerite.



I've never had enough fresh passionflower to make a big batch, but I have made a fantastic passionflower glycerite using dried passionflower and a warming method in a slow cooker. It's also great as a tea but for panic attacks, I find the tincture most effective - just adding fifteen drops to some water or taking it directly on the tongue. And I sometimes take a swig of glycerite from the bottle which I find really effective for me.

Some safety notes - It is recommended to avoid passionflower in pregnancy (with nuance) and caution should be taken with other antidepressants, barbiturates, and sedative medications because of its sedating nature.

### **Skullcap, *Scutellaria lateriflora***

There are many different types of skullcap around the world. I place it in the hypnotic nervine category because it has a sedating effect. In my experience, it can almost instantly put you in a parasympathetic, rest and digest state.

It's also a fantastic nerve tonic. It's full of B vitamins and nutritive constituents that are fantastic for our nervous system. It's something I support people with medium-term. So if someone has a lot of bad anxiety, and a parasympathetic state is unfamiliar to them, I might recommend an infusion of skullcap before bed for six or even eight weeks at a time. I've taken it myself for four months once during a really bad period and it was fantastic at shifting me into a sleep pattern that I'm still in now, which is amazing.

In terms of panic attacks, skullcap helps with acute distress. Similar to the other plants, fifteen drops of the tincture directly on the tongue is really effective. I have made skullcap glycerite which I don't find to be strong enough. I think the tincture is faster-acting. And skullcap tea is great for that sort of hangover time after a panic attack. You might hear this myth that skullcap needs to be made with cold water, but you can make tea, then just let it cool, let it infuse for a good hour and then drink it. You can drink it slightly warm if you like, that's also fine. I think skullcap tea cooled down is amazing.

Some safety notes - It is recommended to avoid skullcap in pregnancy (with nuance). Use caution when nursing or breastfeeding and also with antidepressant medications. Avoid when driving due to its sedative action.

### **Valerian, *Valeriana officinalis***

And the last herb I want to mention for supporting with panic attacks is valerian. It's got loads of different herbal actions and unlike other nervines in

this context, it's actually quite warming. For the people it's effective for, valerian has a great sedative action, but it's not for everyone.

Some people find valerian very stimulating. Unfortunately, I'm one of those people, so if I take valerian at night, it will keep me awake and if I fall asleep, I will have very active nightmares. So be aware when trying valerian and check in with the person you're supporting before taking it if they may have had an adverse reaction before. Some people try all these sleep medications and wonder why they're not working and often I think valerian is a secret culprit. And some people can just take valerian in the daytime for general anxiety, and it doesn't knock them out, other people will take valerian and they'll need to sleep for 12 hours. Everyone is different. You need to find your own pace with herbs and how they affect you.

Valerian can be very effective in panic attack blends. It's really useful for heart palpitations. As mentioned previously, they used valerian to treat soldiers who were experiencing shell shock in the First World War and also used them for civilians in bomb shelters. It's a herb we used a lot with Ukraine Herbal Solidarity. It's a fantastic herb for people who are experiencing really extreme nervous exhaustion, where someone's life is literally threatened by being in such acute shock.

Valerian is also a fantastic nerve tonic for trauma recovery. In my experience, it's got an affinity with the head, and it's been used traditionally with things like epilepsy, vertigo, headaches, migraines, and convulsions. I think that could also be the reason why it can trigger things like nightmares for some people just because of that blood flow to the brain.

Valerian is amazing as a tincture. I've also made fantastic glycerite from the dried root. You can take it in tea and valerian is really effective in powder and capsules which can be great for taking it on a plane for example when you can't take fluids.

Some safety considerations - as I mentioned, some people have an adverse reaction and can actually experience more nervousness, anxiety, and palpitations.

Some people can get real withdrawal symptoms if they're taking valerian longer-term. It can cause drowsiness for some people. And it's generally avoided in pregnancy and in nursing. Use caution if you're taking other sedating or antidepressant medications, especially barbiturates or benzodiazepine.

## Care during a panic attack

There are breathing techniques which can trigger the parasympathetic nervous system and calm the fight or flight response. Box breathing is an example. It simply involves breathing in for four seconds, holding the breath for four seconds, breathing out for four seconds and then holding the breath for four seconds and repeating this until feeling calmer.

Ideally if you're having a panic attack, you have someone around you who can help bring you down, help you breathe, for example, supporting you to copy their breathing. It's important to seek support in general when you can. I tend to call my very close friends or my partner and they'll know if I'm in that distressed state, they can hear that I'm not getting my words out, that I'm just breathing really fast and they will gently calm me down. So finding someone that has a kind of skill in soothing you, I think is really important.

And it's important to rest afterwards. Panic attacks are a lot for the body. They provoke a cascade of stress hormones and have a big effect on our oxygen levels. So sometimes the work is to prevent another panic attack so there isn't a whole sequence of them.

## Preventing panic attacks long-term

In general, our aim with herbal support is to reduce the activation in our nervous systems and there are short-term and longer-term strategies for this. The longer-term strategies are going to be nerve tonics, plants that help us to support our nervous systems to function better, to repair our systems and help them become more resilient.

### **Hawthorn**, *Crataegus monogyna*

A great example is Hawthorn, which is a really beautiful cardiac nerve. It has a strong affinity with the heart and the cardiovascular system and a million other amazing medicinal actions. If your panic attacks are related to, for example, grief or loss or heartache - a breakup, for example - then hawthorn could help. It's great for that emotional energy of grief and loss and it can really help our cardiovascular system.

If you're having panic attacks because your nerves are quite frayed and maybe your blood vessels are inflamed from constant activation, then hawthorn can be a really wonderful, cooling, gentle relaxant. I also take hawthorn in an acute panic attack as well, but it's really fantastic for medium and long-term use.

### **Rose, *Rosa spp***

Obviously I'm a sucker for roses. People can see all over my Instagram, there are always roses in the background: they really are my herb. I even changed my surname to Rose because they just have the most amazing, fierce, femme, and caring energy. Rose is 100 percent a go-to for me in general, but especially with nervous system stuff. It's really wonderful in the panic attack 'comedown' stage. It's soothing, very cooling and anti-inflammatory. I make rose petal glycerite which is just divine, but you can also have rose tincture and rose tea as well, and even products with rose oil in moisturiser, things like that. I think we shouldn't underestimate how even putting on a face cream with rose in it can sometimes help with anxiety.

Rose is really wonderful, similar to hawthorn, at addressing longer-term grief. For people who've experienced a lot of trauma, there's often a lot of loss, despair, and hopelessness. There can be a rejection of love, a feeling that we're unlovable. Losing people we love, really loving and caring for someone while they're dying. For all of these relationships with love and pain, I feel like rose has really got our backs.

### **Milky Oats, *Avena sativa***

This is one of our primary nerve tonics. It's fantastic for the nervous system, as are oats in general. It's great as a tincture. I've also made milky oat glycerite with fresh milky oats, which was delicious. It's great as a long-term tonic for people who have very depressed nerve function or who are very depleted after long periods of chronic stress. I think milky oats are amazing.

### **Betony, *Betonica officinalis* syn. *Stachys officinalis***

Betony is another of my favourite herbs. It's a powerful nerve tonic and has a long history of being used in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Unlike lemon balm, I don't get an instantaneous relaxation from betony, but long-term, it's a bit like milky oats. It's great for a long-term recovery process, especially for stress headaches, for example, betony is amazing.

### **Vervain, *Verbena officinalis***

Vervain is another wonderful nervous system tonic which comes into its own for long term nervous system support. It's strongly indicated for people who menstruate, who experienced a lot of premenstrual tension or kind of distress

and despair around their periods, for example. And I see it in this long term, preventative tonic category.

### **Chamomile**, *Matricaria chamomilla*

And finally, chamomile. It's such an underestimated herb and we often take it for granted because it's available everywhere. But it can be really potent. When my best friend, Sam had cancer in prison, I remember, being in this train station in Peterborough on the way to visit her and realising that I'd already had such a horrible day of constant stress on the trains, nearly missing the visit, being cat-called by a bunch of people... my whole nervous system was activated. I got to the prison, and the prison staff were really awful about my pain relief, and I was in loads of pain. The visit was really emotionally intense, then I had to run for the train, I missed it and then, I realised that that was the moment where I was going to have a panic attack. I saw this coffee stand and they had chamomile tea. I bought a cup and it gave me total relief - an instantly relaxing effect on the nervous system.

Chamomile has this affinity with the guts which is a really big part of how we process distress in the body. Chamomile tincture is great, in a panic attack blend for example. The tea is fantastic. The glycerite is absolutely heavenly.

It's such a fantastic nervine herb for daytime anxiety support, to tune your nervous system down and help cope with capitalism.

### **Preparing blends in advance**

Those are the herbs that I wanted to talk about. I guess the main thing to say is, if you are prone to panic attacks, then it's all about preparation. I would strongly advise you to have a blend in your bag, specifically for an acute panic attack. Valerian, if it's right for you, motherwort, and lemon balm, for example. You can put some drops of it on your tongue. It only needs to be a tiny little 10 ml bottle that you can fit in your pocket.



*Vervain*

Just knowing it's there, can somehow also prevent panic attacks. Maybe you just need to drop dose it through the day or maybe you just have a very strong mix for an acute attack in the moment. If you're supporting someone with a panic attack, and they would like to take some herbs, then being able to support them and being prepared is amazing.

The other aspect is just doing the necessary work on reducing activation over time. So having some kind of daytime anxiety blend that can just take the edge off, for example, lemon balm, hawthorn, rose or chamomile, for example. Gentle nervines that aren't going to knock you out and sedate you so you can't function, but they're going to be supporting you in the background.

And finally, working with nerve tonics, it's great to have some kind of protocol in your life where you are just tending to your nervous system consistently, like whether that's skullcap tea or eating oats for breakfast or having milky oat tincture when you're run down. It's kind of like having a burnout mix.

Panic attacks are an expression of distress in our lives and may be an indication that we may need to change what is contributing to them - leaving a relationship or quitting a job for example. Or they may be responses to things outside our control such as the prison system. Whatever is causing panic attacks, attending to our bodies to help prevent them is one of the beautiful offerings plant medicines give us, whether this is long term support from nerve tonics, or helpful blends in the moment to help soothe us while we are experiencing the distress of a panic attack.

## DEFENDANT SUPPORT & LONG-TERM CHRONIC STRESS

This section is all about the chronic stress involved in being wrapped up in the ‘criminal justice system’ and how it affects people’s lives and wellbeing. I’ve supported hundreds of people over the years experiencing repression, including many people preparing for stressful trials. This section looks at what support has been helpful in general, before sharing a section on herbal support at the end.

One of the critical weapons of the state is to create a lot of uncertainty and fear in your life. Even if you don’t end up with a very long sentence in prison - or any sentence in prison - having the feeling that you might is a real mental weapon of oppression. Humans like to feel a sense of control over their life, a sense of certainty. Events are often more traumatising when we have uncertainty, for example, people with long-term cancer diagnoses have a sense of constant unknowing and closeness to death. It’s so exhausting to navigate those emotions.

Repression is challenging because in our heads, we’re always running the worst-case scenario. I spent two years on bail believing I was likely getting fourteen years in prison (the maximum sentence for my charge). People have different coping strategies. Some defendants I’ve supported are very engaged in their legal work, they might be researching case law, getting witness statements, organising their own support campaigns. They’re proactively doing things, and that gives them a sense of control.

In my experience, lots of people also - as a survival response - prefer to bury their head in the sand. They don’t want to go to legal meetings or read their paperwork, they don’t want to attend court hearings unless they absolutely have to. This kind of avoidance pattern can be really challenging when you’re doing solidarity work. But I think there’s a space in between where support can really happen, where people can grasp a sense of empowerment by working with someone else to read difficult paperwork, get witness statements or do court preparation and cross examination practice. There is a sense of gentle accountability of reminding someone that they have a court date coming up.

Anarchists and other organisers that do anti-repression work are fantastic at this kind of legal support. Often though, the real challenge that people are facing is the emotional onslaught and difficult decisions. How do they interact with people that they’re having relationships with? Do they stay with their

partners, or do they break up with them in case they go to prison? How do they talk to their families or friends and what about their employers or co-workers?

Unfortunately, defendants often feel a lot of shame and humiliation. Maybe they've made a security mistake - a dodgy hard drive has been found by a cop for instance - or maybe they got drunk at a protest, which meant they did things that they wouldn't do when they were sober.

We really noticed this with the Kill the Bill uprising in Bristol. Lots of people were very intoxicated, which meant they were laying into police and throwing things off the police station and doing it all without a mask on. People had to confront a lot of shame and embarrassment about that. Now they're facing years in prison because of something that could have been prevented just by wearing a mask.

In my experiences of supporting people with repression, preparing them for prison is one of the most useful things we can do. We have a comprehensive checklist of things to pack and to take, things to prepare like lists of contacts, copies of prescriptions, things like that. All of these small practical details can help someone feel more in control.

We also connect defendants with former prisoners so that they can ask them questions about what prison is like. How they should act inside for example, or things to avoid like snitching on people or brown-nosing officers.

All of these things can help someone feel more prepared, and that can really help reduce the levels of traumatisation and also the hardcore impacts of PTSD. I don't think they can ever be completely avoided, but solidarity can make a massive difference in reducing how exhausting, alienating, and isolating that experience is.

People often don't realise the effect that the chronic stress of these situations has on our bodies. Everyone has their own 'fault line': the ways that they express distress. Some people get really nervous tummies for example and their digestion just goes completely out of whack when they're under any stress or pressure. Other people will start to get really bad neck pain or muscle pain. Other people might get chronic headaches or migraines. We're all different.

I think our role as herbalists is to help people draw attention to what's happening in their bodies, to help observe how they're expressing distress and then offer support. We can support them with herbs to reduce how scary and activating being in court can be. If someone can go to court feeling calmer and less anxious, then they feel more in control and they're more articulate on the



stand (the place in the court where they get asked questions or ‘cross examined’). How well someone ‘performs’ could make the difference to whether they go to prison or not.

### **Vicarious trauma**

High levels of stress are experienced by families, co-defendants, and other people in the courtroom. It’s a very stressful situation for everyone. It’s horrible witnessing people get sent to prison. It’s horrible seeing the huge power imbalance - the judges, the barristers. It’s horrible seeing how this whole system works and how brutally they treat people.

There is a level of vicarious trauma that people go through. In Bristol, we’ve just watched as over thirty people went to prison, one after the next, and it is so emotionally exhausting. We can prepare someone the best we can and help them try and get off of their charge, but ultimately, we have very little power and people are inevitably going to go to prison until this system has been completely changed.

Part of this work is accepting that this is reality and people will go down and we will watch them go down. We will watch them have their last hugs with their partners who they might not get to touch again for ages. We see them cry and beg not to be taken down. People are extremely distressed in these situations, and we have to witness that. And so do the parents, siblings, friends and partners who walk out of court completely devastated.

I remember when I was seventeen and my boyfriend got sent down with two other friends. I was left completely alone. I got followed by journalists all the way back to my car and when they left, I finally just burst into tears and began to accept that this was really happening. I wish I’d had a support team or a solidarity campaign that could just have sat with me in court and held my hand as I watched the guy I love go to prison. He was never the same again after his experiences inside some of the most violent young offenders institutions in the country.

### **The effects of uncertainty**

I’ve mentioned uncertainty as one factor that makes this all so stressful on the body. Bail conditions are another part of this. These are conditions imposed by the court that someone has to comply with. If they don’t comply with them, then they face the threat of imprisonment and the withdrawal of bail. In my

case, we had a long list of people we weren't allowed to talk to. We'd have to get permission to stay away from home. We weren't allowed to publish anything on the internet or to write articles. There was a complete gagging order about the case. We had to surrender our passports and on and on.

It's not the same as a cop beating you up but actually, it is such a pervasive control of every moment of our life. Can I go to this café or will I bump into someone I'm not allowed to talk to? Will I go to prison for having coffee in the wrong place? Should I just sack off a bail condition and write an article anonymously. But is it worth the risk?

It can be okay for a short amount of time, but I was waiting for over two years before I went to prison. My co-defendants who didn't plead guilty initially were waiting nearly four years. Half a decade of repression, controls, and uncertainty of whether they were going to go to prison, how long they would get. The court dates kept getting pushed back over and over again. I took the initiative to plead guilty because I was just sick of living under this control, and I knew that I was going to get a custodial sentence. I had legal advice that it would be better to just crack on with my sentence and I was out before nearly everyone because of that decision.

With these long timescales and vast amounts of uncertainty, people aren't able to plan the most basic things in their life. Should they get a tenancy on this new flat if they might be going to court? Should they apply for this job, go to university, or take a course? Should they start a new relationship? Prison is constantly hanging over people's heads.

### **The impacts of remand**

Many people are instantly remanded the second they get arrested. Nearly one in seven people are on remand in prisons in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>. Being on remand means you don't know your sentence, some people are convicted (they've pled guilty) but many people haven't and are awaiting trial. Shockingly, the rate of self-inflicted deaths of remand prisoners has consistently been around three times higher than that of convicted prisoners<sup>2</sup>.

I did nineteen months in prison before I even knew how long I would be there for. The process is massively racialised, and classed. If you can't prove 'fixed abode' then you're much more likely to get remanded. If you've got previous convictions you're much more likely to get remanded. If you're a person of colour, you're way more likely to get remanded. Black men are 26%,

and men with a 'mixed ethnic background' are 22% more likely to be remanded in custody at the Crown Court than white men<sup>3</sup>.

When you're on remand, you have to deal with constant uncertainty, but also you're in a prison, so you don't know when you're going to get out, you don't have good communication with your solicitor, you have limited phone credit, limited legal visits, and it all means that you're not adequately resourced to prepare for your trial - if you even get a trial. Remand is a weapon of repression.

### **What can we do? Advice for defendants and the importance of support and solidarity**

My advice to people who are going through any of this is to remember that we're all different and we all benefit from different coping strategies. For myself, I know that I have a tendency to be hyper-responsible, over-controlling, and a planner. Planning is soothing to me. That's not for everyone, but I do think that often we see better results in court when people are more prepared. Part of state intimidation is making us feel like this isn't the place for us, right?

Which it isn't of course - it's absolutely the zone of solicitors and barristers and the upper classes. Yet we can still do our best to fight despite all the inequalities, the massive cuts to legal aid, poor legal support, literacy issues and all those challenges.

If there's access to people that have confidence and experience in supporting people with legal cases, take every offer of help you can get. Embrace your legal nerd friends who like that stuff. Maybe you have a cousin who might have gone out with someone who went to law school, or something. Just pull in all the support you can. Even better if it's someone with experience and who understands the reality of inequalities, but just get as much advice as you can.

Be as proactive as you possibly can be. I would repeatedly plan scenarios of 'okay, if I get ten years, this is what I'm going to do, if I get five years, this is what I'm going to do, if I get a suspended sentence, this is what I'm going to do, and this is where I'm going to live.' I think that scenario planning can give you a sense of control.

Talk to former prisoners. In some ways it can be scary to hear the stories, but in other ways it can also kind of combat some of the myths. We get a lot of cultural baggage about prisons from TV shows and films that just aren't real. Or there's some reality but maybe it's not quite as bad as we imagine. We never talk about the good stuff, for example. When I was in prison there were

some amazing friendships and support and care and love from all these beautiful women and femmes.

Talking to someone who's been inside will help you prevent yourself from filling in the blanks of stuff that you don't know. Everything from whether it's possible to get razors to shave their legs up to how often officers force sex on prisoners and will they get raped. Getting perspectives from someone who's been in prison, who can tell you their truth, is really, really helpful. Likewise, I think reading books about prison, autobiographies and so on can be useful. When I was inside, I was reading Assata Shakur and Nelson Mandela. It can help you feel connected to other people's experiences of prison and of repression.

There's an important question about how public to be with support. There are lots of options, from doing things totally privately, all the way up to really big public campaigns. There are different perspectives about what's best, in terms of tactics. I'm not going to judge people's approaches, but I will name here that from my perspective, I think that solidarity is power. I haven't seen people be harmed by having connections to groups and movements (although there are risks), but I have seen so many people be harmed because they've been isolated from support networks.

There are different ways of running a public support campaign. There might be demonstrations outside court, courtrooms full of people supporting them, people writing political statements and talking to the press. In my experience, those defendants get through their experiences in a much more empowered way

(with all the consequences that has for their nervous systems) because they feel more in control. I know it takes a lot of courage to take a political position which might mean getting a longer time in prison for example but there have also been countless times in history where people have taken a stance and actually been rewarded for it. But of course, every single case is different.



The J20 is a recent example where defendants massively organised with each other. They had support campaigns all over the US including people who were arrested during the Trump inauguration. They came from all different walks of life: journalists, mothers, bystanders, photographers, anarchists, black bloc. They got thrown in together as defendants, and they were facing life sentences in prison, but they were so consistent with their political organising, with huge support campaigns, fundraising, massive legal meetings, making decisions by consensus and so on that they got to a place where they decided that it was an option to not cooperate. They took non-cooperating plea deals, they couldn't be prosecuted and the charges were eventually dropped, which saved sixty-odd people from going to prison for life. There are lots of other examples from history of successful politically organised defence campaigns.

One of my favourite books on this subject is called *Defiance*. It's a list of anarchist speeches from people who were sent to prison throughout history. It goes back hundreds of years and it's really inspiring - some people were even at the gallows, but they refused to back down. Taking inspiration from other political organisers who have gone through the same things, or similar things, is really important.

And other recommendations are the general, basic things around taking care of yourself. Things like getting enough sleep, having social support, having friends that you can talk to and who can listen to you and make you feel supported. This is the time when you need to prioritise your relationships, because the state will intentionally try to destroy them through fear, uncertainty and political divisions in groups. They will try every dirty tactic in the book to keep you alone and isolated, and our best resistance, I think, is developing relationships and sustaining them the best you can. For me I did the whole thing completely alienated. I was separated from people, there was no support campaign. When my ex and I went to court it would cost us thirty quid on travel which was eighty percent of our weekly benefit gone. So then we'd have to shoplift the rest of the week just to feed ourselves. So yeah, I guess I can feel a bit jealous of defendants that have good support networks.

Starting a new hobby – knitting, drawing, whatever you like – can be really distracting and enriching. I know loads of defendants who have got really into tattooing. They taught themselves how to draw in prison and are now tattoo artists. Being really engaged in an activity can support you to access that parasympathetic nervous system state, which is a really powerful tool when the state is trying to create constant fear and anxiety in you.

## Herbal support

Your body will be experiencing stress, and everyone expresses it in different ways. You might be developing health issues and getting support from a health practitioner can be really valuable. We often think about getting counselling after prison, but it's actually more effective to resource yourself as much as possible before a potential sentence. I definitely wish that was something that I'd done.

Herbs can support you to sleep well, they can reduce general day to day anxiety, and they can help in acute moments of distress, such as panic attacks. They can help you through long court cases. Some people, especially in big political trials, are in court for several weeks at a time, sometimes three months at a time so having ongoing care for your immune system to prevent colds and Covid-19 and everything else is really important. There are loads of herbs that can support with digestion, flatulence, or nervous anxiety.

You might be someone who experiences muscle tension, in which case amazing herbs like lavender oil and muscle ointments with comfrey and arnica and St. John's wort can be absolutely fantastic. Please see the '*herbal solidarity in practice: court support packs*' section for examples of medicines that are helpful during trials.

In short, there's loads of ways to tend to your body and it's also a brilliant time to begin your practice of herbalism. Start having a sit spot every day where you go somewhere and connect with the land. Just go and sit by a pond or a lake. Take a walk by the sea or in a local wood. Even in the bigger cities there's always parks and benches and places where you can just sit and watch squirrels and see the seasons change. Drawing on the strength of the land is important because you're facing so much uncertainty in your life, but the land is there. It's stable, consistent, and I think that's really powerful for people.

We can resist with our bodies by saying "*no, I'm going to take this time for me and I'm going to feel good today. And I'm going to feel calmer because I've spent some time on the land and that's going to make me feel nourished and resourced.*" I do think that a part of resisting the state is clinging to that aliveness in ourselves.

## Final thoughts

In the end, it's all about support, relationships and solidarity. If you're someone who's not experiencing repression like this, then I'm almost certain there's people around you who are. You can show your support by getting involved in groups as care workers, herbalists, people offering emotional support.

These are all skills that massively complement groups doing legal work. We need all skill sets to take care of each other. Reaching out and getting involved with groups actively doing that work could make a massive difference to someone's life.

A lot of people who get caught up in repression are those that are extremely dedicated, competent, engaged and determined. It's often those who are taking massive risks for earth, animal and human liberation and we don't want to lose them. No one is disposable. It's not okay that people are super active, get caught in repression and then they disappear from our movements. We need to value each other and take care of each other so that we can sustain these struggles for freedom for the long haul and ultimately achieve the goals that we want to achieve.

Taking care of people is intrinsically important of course. But also, this is how we win. This is how we keep our movements alive. We refuse to let the state churn up another group of people every single generation who just disappear. Instead we need to take care of each other. We're not just sustaining organisers who are doing the work, care and solidarity are the work.

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## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* **COURT SUPPORT PACKS**

Posting care packages to people on trial or in some way navigating the ‘criminal justice system’ has been a mainstay of the Solidarity Apothecary. As detailed in the defendant support and long term chronic stress section, this period of repression can take its toll on people. I’ve included two examples of court support packs with the text written in the same way that it was sent to the people on trial. I thought it could be helpful for people doing similar work because as herbalists a large part of our work is explaining our remedies. We also need to always be aware of safety needs and give instructions of how and when to take something, especially for people new to herbalism.

### **Stansted 15**

The first group was the ‘Stansted 15’. This was a group of people who took direct action to stop a deportation flight leaving from Stansted Airport in March 2017. You can read about deportations in the introduction to border violence section. The plane, a Titan Airways Boeing 767 was chartered by the UK Home Office to deport sixty people to Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The group locked their arms together in pipes in front of the plane with a banner saying “Mass deportations kill” and did consistent media work throughout the case to raise awareness about deportations. They were initially charged with aggravated trespass but this was escalated to scarier terrorism-related charges that carried hefty prison time. With this shift, I got involved in the support campaign, initially with an aim of supporting people to potentially prepare for prison.

The group faced an exhausting ten-week trial where they were eventually found guilty - under the 1990 Aviation and Maritime Security Act - of intentional disruption of services at an aerodrome.

In a statement released by End Deportations after the verdict, the defendants said, “*We are guilty of nothing more than intervening to prevent harm. The real crime is the government’s cowardly, inhumane and barely legal deportation flights and the unprecedented use of terror law to crack down on peaceful protest.*”

Fortunately, people were given suspended sentences and not sent straight



to prison (I don't want to minimise the effect of suspended sentences as they are also restrictive weapons of repression). Some were given community orders. The convictions were later overturned in January 2021 on appeal.

This is what I shared with the group and their supporters during the trial:

### **Solidarity Apothecary for the Stansted 15**

Enclosed are some herbal treats for you all to help you get through the next six weeks. These are all plants I have used for years and years through periods of chronic stress and state repression. All are handmade with plants I've grown or foraged where I live. Please see some guidance on amounts to take below, as well as some precautions.

As with all of these plants, just experiment and see how you feel. I hope they can nourish you and support you during this experience. Also – just let me know if you run out of anything, and I can put more in the post.

Huge love and solidarity,

Nicole xxx

**Elderberry and Rosehip Syrup:** An immune tonic packed with vitamin C. Elderberries are an incredible antiviral and anti-microbial tonic. Hopefully, this can keep the colds at bay during the trial. Take a spoonful a day. Avoid it if you can't have sugar.

**Nettle leaf:** Nettles are a rich mineral tonic, also full of iron and so will help you cope with stress. Either include some in a tea, or even better – leave to infuse overnight in water, then strain and drink the next morning.

**Elderberry Tincture:** This tincture is for anyone who might start coming down with a cold or virus during the trial. It can be taken as a preventative if anyone is on the edge due to stress/late nights/lots of train journeys. As a tonic, take twice a day – 25 drops in some water. If someone is getting ill in an acute way, take 25 drops every few hours in water to help nip a cold in the bud.

**Chamomile Tincture:** Chamomile is an incredible carminative for the stomach – so if anyone is nervous before court, a few drops in some water will help. It can have a very calming effect so be careful if you are a very sensitive person (for example, it puts me to sleep!). We process a lot of stress in our guts so

it's great to have a protectant like this during a trial. It can also support people to get to sleep if they are having trouble sleeping due to stress.

**Hawthorn Tincture:** Hawthorn is an incredible plant in times of stress/despair/grief/shock. It is a cardiac and circulation tonic helpful for anxiety. Please don't use it if anyone is on heart-related medication. Otherwise, it's a very safe herb and has got me through many times of grief and stress. A few drops (10-30) a couple of times a day will help take the edge off.

**St John's Wort Tincture:** St John's wort is prescribed all over the world as an antidepressant. For many, they have to take it for a couple of months for it to work. For myself, I tend to take it just when I'm premenstrual and have used it in shorter time-frames before and it's worked powerfully. Good for anyone who is struggling in a depressed way, needing a 'pick-up' to help them cope and sustain their energy. It also has anti-viral properties. Speak to me if you are taking any other medication as it may not be safe due to its effects on the liver.

**Vervain Tincture:** Vervain is a fantastic herb for stress and works as a tonic for the parasympathetic nervous system as well as the liver. Do not take if pregnant. Take 20 drops a day in water – you can take a couple of times a day if struggling with nervous tension/stress. I find it's also a really great tonic if I am premenstrual.

**Betony Tincture:** Betony is an under-used herb with an amazing effect on the nervous system, I adore it. It can help reduce blood pressure and is great for anxiety. It is also useful for some digestive issues like diarrhoea. Experiment with it – I like to take 25 drops or so in the morning when going through a hard time.

## **JCB Campaign**

The next example court support pack was for a group of four people in court for blockading a road to JCB's World Logistics Headquarters in March 2019. JCB bulldozers are used to build Israel's illegal settlements and to expand Israel's apartheid wall in the West Bank. They are also used in the construction of checkpoints and roadblocks. The statistics of JCB's complicity in war crimes are published by the resource Corporate Occupation. In 2019, more than 29,483 people were affected by incidents involving JCB machines. Fortunately,

all defendants from the Stop the Demolitions campaign were acquitted.

This is what I shared with the group and their supporters during the trial:

### **Defendant Support Herbs**

Please find some plant medicines enclosed to help support your health during your trial and the ongoing repression. Everything has been made by me with plants grown at a vegan organic smallholding in Somerset (with no captive animals or manures used). All the plants are relatively safe but everyone reacts differently to plants so please listen to your own body in terms of dosage or what works for you. If you have any questions or run out of anything please email me at [info@solidarityapothecary.org](mailto:info@solidarityapothecary.org)

**Elderberry Tincture:** Elderberry has incredible antiviral and antibacterial properties. This tincture is for anyone who might start coming down with a cold or virus during the trial. It can also be taken as a preventative if anyone is on the edge due to stress.

How to take: As a preventative, take twice a day – 25 drops in some water. If someone is getting ill in an acute way, take 25 drops every few hours in water to help nip a cold in the bud.

**Fire Cider Vinegar:** This vinegar is made by infusing onion, garlic, lemon, horseradish, chilli, cayenne pepper, black peppercorns, turmeric, rosemary and ginger. It is incredibly warming and will help ward off colds and infections due to its strong anti-microbial properties.

How to take: Take 1-2 teaspoons in water (or juice) at the first sign of a cold. You can also take a teaspoon as a preventative.

**Rose Petal Glycerite:** Rose petals are a fantastic resource for the nervous system and a very cooling remedy for hot, inflamed conditions. I have included it to help you calm/wind down after being in a stressful situation like a courtroom. It brings a feeling of comfort and relief. It is also great after moments of acute stress (like an interaction with the cops). Because it is quite cooling, it is worth taking it once you are back inside and warmed up, or when you are feeling really hot and stressed.

How to take: Simply take a sip when you need it.

**Lemon Balm Tincture:** Lemon balm is a wonderful antiviral plant that also supports with anxiety. It can also help calm a nervous digestive system. It is worth taking both as a preventative (like one teaspoonful every day). It is great if your digestive system is a bit off due to stress/interrupted sleep or if you are feeling particularly anxious or stressed.

How to take: Simply take a few drops in water when you need it.

**Lavender Oil:** Lavender is such an amazing ally for stress. This oil is to help folks calm down/wind down/sleep. It is simply organic lavender and organic olive oil. It is best to not use it when driving but if you are particularly stressed you could spray a little on yourself. It can make you sleepy though so not the best if you are trying to stay awake.

How to take: You can spray/apply it anywhere on yourself. It is great to put a little bit on your temple and the back of your neck to help with sleep. You can also rub it on sore shoulders and add it to the bath.

**Heavy Heart Tea Blend:** This tea blend is designed to help soothe our hearts during moments of struggle. It contains hawthorn flowers, lemon balm, rose petals, chamomile, lavender and skullcap. I have also included some elderflower for immune support. All of these plants have a supportive action on the nervous system.

How to take: Add the dried herbs to a tea pot or some kind of cafetiere and add hot water.



*An example court support pack*



*Bottles of rose petal glycerite*

## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* **SOLIDARITY SNIFFERS**

**J20 context:** On January 20, 2017, thousands of people took to the streets in Washington DC in the United States to protest the inauguration of Donald Trump. Of this number, 200 were corralled into an enclosed area and arrested. These 200 include people from all walks of life: teachers, photographers, journalists, medics. They faced felony charges for attending a protest and were looking at up to 80 years in prison. A highly coordinated anti-repression campaign emerged with people responding with legal support, fundraising, emotional support and more. The state's legal case eventually collapsed but it was not without impact on the defendants and supporters that worked incredibly hard to achieve this result.

**By Herbalista:** Herbalista chose to send our support in the form of aromatic inhalers, aka sniffers. We have found sniffers to be an extremely effective way to provide emotional support. They are easy to carry, convenient to use, and extremely affordable and easy to make. You can order the blank inhalers from most any essential oil supplier these days.

We chose to send 3 different sets of sniffers:

- Lavender Sniffers (Lavender essential oil) – grounding, promotes calm composure, soothes anxiety, allows for full expression, also helpful for headaches and insomnia
- Olbas Sniffers (Blend of Peppermint, Eucalyptus, Cajuput, Wintergreen, Juniper, and Clove) – clearing, energising, uplifting, also helpful for headaches and sinus congestion
- Solidarity Sniffers (Blend of Jasmine, Clary Sage, Benzoin, Lemon, Rose, and Patchouli) – soothing, stabilising, nourishing, revitalising, earthing, trust and solidarity

To make a sniffer, you simply place a cotton wick inside the tube, place 9 drops of essential oil inside, and snap closed.

Sniffers are useful tools when dealing with a range of feelings from grief to anxiety to addiction. One of my favorite books that we often refer to when putting together our aromatic remedies is *Aromatherapy for Healing the Spirit* by Gabriel Mojay, a wonderful acupuncturist, aromatherapist, and teacher who travels over the pond from England to visit us here in Atlanta from time to time.

*The Herbalista Health Network recognises healthcare as a fundamental human right and works to protect health access through clinical services and educational opportunities. We strive for a community based model of healthCARE that is based on solidarity and not charity. Learn more about the variety of Herbalista projects at <https://herbalista.org>*



## *Remedies & Recipes*

### **BRAVE HEART BLEND**

The Brave Heart Blend is one of my ‘signature’ blends that I’ve used so many times over the years when supporting people experiencing repression.

Energetic cautions: The blend is quite cooling with three plants of a predominantly cold nature. Therefore for someone with a very cold constitution it may not be appropriate. However, I find it is perfect for the ‘type-A’/hyper-responsibility/workaholic tendencies of frontline organisers that tend to have hotter/warmer constitutions.

It contains three herbs in equal parts:

#### **Hawthorn**, *Crataegus monogyna*

Made with: Warm infused berry glycerite, or cold infused berry or flower glycerites (or both combined)

Hawthorn is such an incredible support for the nervous system and a tonic for anyone experiencing chronic stress, grief, trauma or heartache. It’s a cooling herb that supports us to release sympathetic activation e.g. agitation, restlessness, irritability, anger, rage while bringing longer term support to the nervous system. Hawthorn berries contain anthocyanidins that relax the blood vessels and give us an overall relaxant effect. Hawthorn is a very well studied herb in terms of cardiovascular support (recovery from congestive heart failure, reducing blood pressure, anxiety etc). In addition to this cardiovascular support, Hawthorn has a collagen stabilising action and really benefits the muscles and connective tissue. Many people experience chronic stress as muscle tension and pain. Hawthorn is best taken over the long term which is why it’s a great addition to the blend to offer consistent support long-term through challenging waves of repression.

#### **Rose**, *Rosa spp*

Made with: Cold infused fresh petal glycerite

Roses offer tender support to nervous systems that are under pressure and distress. Energetically, rose offers support for grief, heartache, fear and emotional

pain of different kinds. They are very cooling and supportive for inflammation in the cardiovascular system. Rose petal glycerite is incredibly sweet and this sweet taste is additionally nourishing to the nervous system.

Elisabeth Brooke, author of the book *Traditional Western Herbal Medicine*, writes how “*Rose is an excellent heart remedy following shock, trauma, heartbreak and all kinds of depression and anxiety. It cools agitation and restlessness, gives hope and space and helps to drown out dark negative feelings such as suspicion, cynicism, bitterness and anger. Rose brings a feeling of love, wellbeing, peace and happiness*”.

### **Lemon Balm, *Melissa officinalis***

Made with: Cold infused fresh glycerite

Lemon balm is an incredible support for the nervous system. It is relatively mild in the sense that it's not hypnotic so it won't interfere with your everyday tasks. It won't make you feel drowsy or 'knocked out' like other hypnotic nervines, yet it has an instant relaxant effect. It is also slightly trophorestorative so can support recovery and strengthen burned out nerves. Therefore it's fantastic in a long-term blend to help consistently support someone through the stress of repression.



*Hawthorn Flowers*



*Hawthorn Berries*



## *Remedies & Recipes*

### HEAVY HEART TEA BLEND

This tea blend is a beautiful offering for people experiencing repression.

I originally created it for people engaged in sabotage of the badger cull in England but since then I've consistently included it in court support packs. I originally wrote: "For folks sabbing the cull, there is a lot of stress, frustration, rage, as well as heartbreak when we know that animals have been shot. This tea blend is designed to help soothe our hearts during moments of struggle. It contains hawthorn flowers, lemon balm, rose petals, chamomile, lavender and skullcap. Please note it can be quite cooling in energy, so best drunk hot or at the end of the night when you are warmed up inside. All of these plants have a supportive action on the nervous system."

**How to take:** Add the dried herbs to a tea pot or some kind of cafetiere and add hot water.

#### **Ingredients and their approximate ratios in the blend:**

- Chamomile 30%
- Lemon Balm 30%
- Skullcap 20%
- Hawthorn flowers 10%
- Lavender flowers 5%
- Rose Petals 5%

**Energetic cautions:** The blend is quite cooling. Similar to the brave heart blend, for someone with a very cold constitution it may not be appropriate. However, I find it is perfect for the 'type-A'/hyper-responsibility/workaholic tendencies of frontline organisers that tend to have hotter/warmer constitutions. Likewise, for people experiencing a court case they may have a lot of sympathetic nervous system activation e.g. anxiety, anger or simply energy that is immobilised by sitting in court all day and having to repress their feelings and responses.

## *Contribution: Remedies & Recipes*

### SOOTHING SPICED LAVENDER MILK

*Mila Wood*

This simple spiced milk is reminiscent of a milky masala chai - except there's no tea leaves and we've added a wonderful nervine herb: good old English lavender. Caffeine found in tea and coffee is not always helpful when you are stressed, and so by infusing milk with lavender it's an easy way to support your nervous system. Lavender is an aromatic, slightly bitter herb that may help you sleep better and can provide relief during times of depression, anxiety and stress. I find the combination of lavender and ginger particularly calming for anxiety-induced nausea. This milk is just as comforting drunk warm before bed as it is sipped iced on a hot summer's day. Lavender is generally considered safe (for children and elderly too).

If lavender is hard to come by, you could swap it for anything calming flower like chamomile. Powdered spices can be used instead of whole but ensure you whisk the powders and milk thoroughly in the pan to combine. The beauty of this recipe is that it is totally customisable so you can play around with it to suit your tastes and ingredients you have.

#### **Ingredients:**

- 2 cinnamon sticks, crushed
- 1 black peppercorn
- 2 cloves
- 1 tsp fresh ginger, grated or chopped
- 1 cardamom pod
- 1/2 tsp dried lavender or 1 tsp fresh lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- 1 big cup milk of choice (I like to use oat milk)
- optional: 1/2 tsp vanilla extract

### **Powdered Spices Version:**

- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground ginger
- Pinch ground cloves
- Pinch ground cardamom
- 1 shake of a pepper grinder
- 1/2 tsp dried lavender or 1 tsp fresh lavender
- 1 big cup milk of choice
- optional: 1/2 tsp vanilla extract



### **Directions:**

1. Crack the cardamom pod and put into a saucepan along with the other spices and pour over the milk
2. Simmer gently, do not boil as you do not want your milk to evaporate away
3. After 10 minutes, or when the liquid looks silky, is a slightly different colour, and bubbles have formed on the surface, strain and pour into a cup
4. Add sweetener to taste if necessary - sugar, stevia, honey, maple syrup etc
5. Enjoy hot or iced. If you want to drink it iced, let it cool down in the fridge (or freezer if you're impatient like me) for a while and pour over ice if you have some.

*Mila is an aid worker, freelance writer, and lover of all that's good in the world. She runs a small apothecary brand in the South East of the UK, creating skincare and herbal remedies from her home in the woods. If you would like to reach out, she is always up for a chat and is active on her instagram page @milasapothecary.*

*Contribution:*  
**I WILL WAIT FOR YOU IN THE FOREST / TE ESPERARÉ EN EL  
BOSQUE**

*Mar*

In the winter of 2012 Canadian tar sands enterprise US Oil Sands announced that it would come to the Southwest to build the first operational tar sands mine in the United States, right next door to the largest, most dense organism on the planet, the Pando aspen grove. This regenerating clonal being was born over 80,000 years ago and spreads far and deep into the mountains through its ancient root system. In that same year the discretionary mandate known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), was announced. This mandate allowed for undocumented immigrants who had crossed the border as minors, like myself, to apply for a work permit. As environmental activists and local organizers geared up to fight a titan, I began the process of fighting another.

This is how I met my best friends, in between meetings about migrant solidarity, climate justice, and Indigenous sovereignty. Without money or stable housing, I used public resources from the library to prepare the forms required for me to apply, and then began hosting workshops to help other immigrants navigate the confusing world of immigration regulations. This is how we wound up in the mountains, deep in the forest, in a resistance camp with other formerly homeless punks dreaming of a different world than the one we lived in. I grew up in two places, one was a city next to the ocean, the second was a mountainous town surrounded by aspens. Beneath the canopy I read Harsha Walia's *Undoing Border Imperialism* and understood myself and my chosen family a little better.

The Southwestern United States is a beautiful place full of valleys, rivers, and forests. It is also intensely conservative, racist, and hostile. Migrants attempting to cross the US-Mexico border very often do not make it, not just because of the desert, but because of the people chasing them. This is how we grew up, most of us in broken homes, queer and trans anarchist Indigenous migrant forest fairies. This is also how we organized, away from the electoral gaze, deep in the woods. We didn't try to convince people to vote for a candidate, to us, victory didn't come from politicians, only from the total liberation of all people and the

abolition of all borders. Camp, to us, meant a home away from everything, a space to dream and construct what life could be. “We are here to protect this forest, and we are here to reimagine what the world could look like”. At camp, we didn’t need to be anything other than ourselves.

In the winter of 2017 US Oil Sands announced its bankruptcy, and the abandoned half finished tar sands mine in the Uinta basin began to gather dust. We didn’t have a lot of time to celebrate, most of us had spent the previous summer at Oceti Sakowin, in direct opposition of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Over a year later, ongoing health issues plagued organisers in all of our constellations. In therapy, I was asked to choose a smell that wasn’t associated with painful memories. I chose lavender. Me and my friends organized foraging trips while dumpster diving. In our small town most produce was separated when being thrown away, and neighbors didn’t use pesticides in their organic food gardens and yards. On moonlit bicycle rides we would make floral bouquets that we would later hang in our kitchen, and load up our baskets with perfect pears and potatoes. Three times a week we gave away food in a local park. Our dried herb bundles decorated local infoshops, music venues, and legal aid clinics.

In the mountainous desert, Ts’ahtsoh grows everywhere. You can smell it as soon as you get to the valley, big sagebrush bushes on every slope of the mountain, the three-toothed leaf tips pointing towards their twisty wooden bodies. When we came back to the mountains, we drank sagebrush tea and inhaled the steam deeply. I did as a friend taught me and made pouches of sagebrush, mint, and rosemary for others to steam as well.

### **One recipe for an herbal mix to steam achy tear gassed lungs**

Ingredients: mullein, sage, mint, rosemary, rose

Mix all ingredients and place in hot water, let herbs simmer.

Inhale steam deeply with one breath.

Cough as you exhale, if you can. Take your time.

While at Standing Rock we had been met with state violence over and over again, on one cold night we were blasted with water in freezing temperatures, and targeted with tear gas by police as we attempted to leave. It was later revealed that Enbridge, the same company attempting to build the Dakota Access Pipeline also gave millions of dollars to the police department during the construction of the Line 3 Pipeline. These pipelines and mining sites and the

police that protect them are all interconnected. The Keystone XL pipeline was planned with the intention of carrying over 830,000 barrels of tar sands oil, a crude substance that at its mining site has been linked to cancerous tumors in the neighboring Indigenous communities of Alberta, Canada. All of these sites were operated by crews that had disproportional links to missing and murdered Indigenous women in the neighboring towns.

In 2021, I was arrested in front of one of the worksites of the Line 3 pipeline, I was transported in shackles from one jail to another. Later I was strip searched and put in a windowless cell alone. When I woke up the next day I was told that I was being released. Reunited with some of my co-defendants in a cafeteria, while separated from some, we listened as one beautiful comrade filled the room with their songs, from their solitary cell. We blew kisses to each other across cells and reassured and comforted each other. My incarceration only lasted one day, but my trial would last a little over a year. During that time me and my codefendants sent each other letters, care packages, and homemade salves.

### **One recipe for an herbal salve to soothe forest defenders**

Ingredients:

- Cempasuchil Oil, Coconut Oil
- Rose, Comfrey, Plantain,
- St. Johns Wort, and Beeswax

Mix all ingredients using a double boiler method.

Pour into containers small enough to fit into a friend's pockets.

Let salve cool before using it.

After my trial was over I began studying horticulture and botany, joined a community garden, and joined the local street medic team, encouraged by another queer brown trans not-fully-able bodied street medic. I made more salves. I labeled every salve and remedy that I made with a handwritten label listing the ingredients. At the top, I wrote: "Made With Love For Water Protectors and Land Defenders". I mixed herbs that friends grew and learned to pickle the food that I began growing. These last few years I've found myself slowing down more than ever. Yerbalismo has taught me that the strongest medicine is made with time. Being from the Global South has only strengthened mine and many immigrant's convictions: We should not have to justify our existence nor our actions in crossing borders, in a world that allows death and displacement to be

the penalty of poverty.

It's been over a decade since I was homeless, but I remember it so vividly. I remember piercing my nose in the shelter's bathroom while my roommates cheered me on. I remember spending mother's day with my friends, cursing out our homophobic families, and heading to the abandoned houses by the river to pretend that we were different people. I remember hiking into the forest that divided our town and losing ourselves in the aspens. Using old forgotten wood to create a home. Building an altar and placing candles and portraits on a tree trunk. Sometimes, I would bring a book from the library, it was usually science fiction. "Are you coming back?" My friends would ask me as they left to go back to the shelter. It always felt like a loaded question. Dusk fell rapidly around us and I lit a fire to stay warm. An owl flew above us and rattled the leaves. On the altar, an old friend smiled, and I smiled back. "I will wait for you here in the forest," I whispered. "Te esperaré". Stars shone above us, a thousand worlds away, in the firelight it almost looked like they were dancing towards each other.

"No, I think I'll stay here".

### **One recipe for a bitter herbal tea to drink next to a campfire**

Ingredients:

- Dry Reishi Mushroom (keep this separate)
- Chaga, Cinnamon, Mullein

Steep Reishi for 1 to 2 hours. Steep all other herbs for 10 to 15 minutes.

Add sweetness.

*Mariella Mendoza Cárdenas is a farmworker and visual artist, with roots in the Andes and the Amazon Rainforest. They are currently studying horticulture and urban gardening in Brooklyn, New York.*

*Contribution:*  
**NERVINE TONIC FOR BUILDING THE NEW WORLD IN THE SHELL  
OF THE OLD**

*Stella Maris*

**Your strong foundation: an approach to formulation and a three-part nervine tonic for building the new world in the shell of the old**

My intention with this formula is to incorporate a variety of influences that support a balanced nervous system and vibrant emotional health. What follows here is more of a template than a specific recipe, but I feel that it can be a useful formula that others can elaborate on and interpret in their own way, specific to their own life experiences, personal geography, and background. I will include a general description and my own personal interpretation.

The formulation process outlined here can be used for a variety of different herbal preparations, including tinctures, teas, oxymels, etc.

Formula:

- One nervine herb that grows in the place where you live
- One nervine herb that is traditionally used in one of your lineages
- One nervine herb that you associate with positive memories and have a strong personal affinity for

This formula calls for three ingredients and gives no specific quantities. While the general formula calls for one plant in each part, you could also create a mixture of different herbs in each part of the formula. My general recommendation would be to stick to nervine herbs that are safe to consume in food-like quantities, as tonics, or as beverage teas, and that if you want to choose herbs with more specific actions on the body, to moderate the proportions of ingredients accordingly. This recipe calls for plants that you know well and whose effect on your own body you are already familiar with. Finally, you may also wish to bring in herbs that have nutritive properties which will support the nervine action of the formula.



The herb from the place where you live brings in the support of the land that you live on and creates an essence of your connection to place. Embodied presence in your physical environment is upheld by the support of a lineage that is significant to you. The lineage can be from your family background, but it can also be the lineage of a cultural or creative figure who has influenced and shaped your life experience. Finally, I included an herb that you have a visceral personal experience of and which has the power to summon good memories which can support you in your present and help you move into the future. My intention in combining the ingredients in this way is to create a remedy that illustrates how we are supported in the work of transforming the world, by the earth and its other-than-human inhabitants, by our ancestors, and by our own life stories, which can be a source of strength and hope.

My personal formula:

- Pineappleweed (*Matricaria discoidea*): grows where I live
- Oat straw (*Avena sativa*) and Hawthorn flower, leaf, and thorn (*Crataegus spp.*): two plants I associate with Ireland, where part of my family is originally from
- Wild rose (*Rosa multiflora*): one of my all-time favorite plants

I put the herbs in a jar, covered them with dark rum, and set them aside for a month, shaking daily. After a month, I strained the herbs out. Half the infused rum will be used as a tincture and half will

be mixed with honey to make an elixir. Be creative and make the preparations that you know will serve you and those you work with. Take care and be well.



*Pineappleweed*

*Stella Maris is a language teacher, artist, and community herbalist. Her favorite plants are Multiflora Rose and Sweetfern, and her Instagram account is @sweetfernstudio13.*

## *Contribution:* NUTRITIONAL RESILIENCE

*Pitchfork Cafe*

### **Eating well**

Good nutrition supports good health, which seems fairly obvious, right? But it's also all a bit confusing, and life does seem to get in the way, as well as our profit driven food system that is just not very conducive to achieving a healthy diet. Improving just some of our eating habits and nutrition can be pretty unambitious and simple though, and can quickly make a marked difference to how you feel, your energy levels and your overall wellbeing. I'm not going to go into excessive and patronising detail here, but just want to offer some reminders of easy things you can do to look after yourself.

A few basic tips for eating well, especially on a plant based diet:

- Drink water. There are countless benefits to good hydration, and it's a simple habit to try to cultivate.
- Avoid too many processed foods; it's hopefully fairly obvious what a difference replacing just a few crisps and ready meals with fruit and home cooked dinners would make. This doesn't mean you have to constantly cook from scratch and only eat lentils; there are lots of quick and easy healthy meal options. Make sure you have a good selection of healthy snacks at hand too, such as nuts, fruit both fresh and dried, dips, wholegrain crackers etc.
- Similarly, avoid too much refined sugar and white flour products, they mess with your blood sugar and contribute to inflammation in your body.
- Try to base your diet mainly around plenty of veg and fruit – if you can, subscribe to a local veg box scheme – whole grains, pulses, nuts and seeds, mushrooms (which are little nutritional powerhouses). If they don't already feature regularly in your diet, try seaweeds for their uniquely rich mineral content, berries for all their vitamins and antioxidants, fermented foods to help your gut, and wild foods, especially the more bitter tasting greens, something often missing from our palate. There's

no need to waste your money on expensive ‘superfoods’ or gimmicky health food products.

If you’re vegan, review your sources of the following nutrients: vitamin B12 (only needed in small amounts but vital – mostly only obtained in a vegan diet by fortified products or supplements); omega 3 fatty acids (an important fat that most people don’t consume enough of – vegan sources are ground linseeds, chia and hemp seeds, walnuts and microalgae-based supplements); and vitamin D, which although it’s mostly made from exposure to sunlight is often deficient, especially in the winter, contributing to low immune systems and moods.

### **Build resilience through food**

There are a lot of things you can do to build a more solid foundation to support your physical and mental health, as well as fight off infections and deal with stress. Key are a healthy digestion, steady blood sugar and a strong, supported immune system. Review your intakes of vitamins and minerals – have a look at the main sources for each and consider whether you eat enough of these in your daily diet. If you suspect you are allergic to any particular food – this can be a true allergic reaction or an intolerance, i.e. you have trouble digesting it – try cutting this out for up to 2 weeks, then reintroducing it to assess your reaction.

Do you generally suffer from bloating or uncomfortable stomach pains, frequent colds, or do you have a tricky time on the loo? All of these may be caused by your gut not working as well as it could. It could even be affecting your emotional states and mental health.

### **To support your digestive system:**

- Take time to eat. Don’t rush meals if you can avoid it; sit down, chew well, make it an occasion. This will also help develop your sense of satiety from your meal.
- Eat regularly – don’t skip meals. Avoid eating late at night, which may also disrupt your sleep.
- Bitter tastes have become rare in our Western diets, but are great for stimulating digestive processes (hence the traditional use of aperitifs!). Try bitter salad leaves, strong green tea or stewed chamomile or peppermint tea before meals to help get your digestive juices flowing and functioning well.

- Use herbs and spices which contain carminatives, which will aid your bowels as well as help with using the nutrients from your meal.
- Support your microbiome – i.e. the billions of bacteria living in your gut that have been found to fulfil so many positive functions in our body, from supporting the immune system to affecting your mood. Good gut bacteria love fibre – from veg, wholegrains and seeds - in your diet, as well as unpasteurised, ‘live’ fermented foods such as sauerkraut and kimchi.

### **Aim for more steady blood sugar and energy levels**

Carbohydrates in your diet get broken down to sugars in your body, providing vital energy. As the sugars pass from your digestive system into your bloodstream, your blood sugar levels rise. Your body has systems to regulate your blood sugar and keep it at a steady level. However, if it rises dramatically – say, after a sugary snack – the system has to work extra hard to bring it back down, and then often overshoots – leading to significant ups and downs in your blood sugar levels which will affect your energy levels as well as having knock on effects on other body systems, affecting your mood, and in the long term increasing your risk of diabetes and heart disease. If you tend to experience these kinds of swings in your energy, have a look at your dietary habits. Maybe you can replace some simple sugar foods (white flours and sugar) with more slow releasing carbohydrates – wholegrains, fruit and veg that contain fibre – as well as more proteins and fats to mix it up; all this will also make you feel fuller for longer. Try to eat regularly, don’t skip meals or snack constantly.

Finally, if you are suffering a lot of stress, think about your sources of magnesium, calcium, omega 3s, vitamin B and C, and consider your caffeine and alcohol intakes and how they may be affecting you.

### **Recipe for homemade kimchi**

Fills a 2.5 litre jar or a few smaller ones

- 1 large Chinese cabbage (about 1.2 kg)
- 100g coarse sea salt (less if you are using table salt)
- 1 litre water
- 4 spring onions
- 1.5 cm piece of root ginger
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 1 small mooli/daikon/white radish (about 400g)

- 1 tsp miso (ideally the lighter kind)
- 4-5 tbsp Korean chilli powder, or cayenne and paprika mixed
- 1 tbsp sugar

Cut off any discoloured bits of the cabbage, then quarter lengthways and cut quarters into 5 cm long pieces if you like. Mix the cabbage in a large bowl with most of the salt and some water, rubbing salt into the root ends of the cabbage as you submerge it. Cover the bowl with a plate with a weight on it and put aside in a cool but not cold place for 6-12 hours. You are aiming to soften and wilt the cabbage; it should be bendy at the end of the process. Drain, keep the water, and rinse well a few times.

Peel and julienne slice the white radish (into thin strips) and mix it in a small bowl with the miso and 1 tbsp chilli pepper, massaging it all in well. Finely chop the spring onions and mix in with the radish.

Peel and finely chop the garlic and the ginger. Mix this in a bowl with the drained cabbage along with the rest of the chilli and sugar. Add the radish mixture, stuffing it between the leaves.

Stuff this into clean, dry jars leaving a good gap at the top, and pour in enough of the salted soaking water to just about cover (not too much). Cover the jar loosely with a lid, and set aside in a cool place to ferment for 1-7 days. Sniff it to check – it should get a bit sour, but not too strong. Screw the lid on properly and keep in the fridge for a few more days before eating. It will keep in a cool dark place for quite a long time, depending on the ingredients used.

*Pitchfork Cafe organise delicious, affordable vegan feasts in the Bristol area raising money for grassroots groups. <https://twotreescatering.org/pitchfork-cafe/>*

*Contribution:*

## TRAUMA, THE GUT AND HEALING: BUILDING DEEP RESILIENCY WITH HERBS

*Jon Keyes*

Imagine yourself as a small child and living in a household where your parents drink excessively, argue and at times lash out angrily and abusively towards you. Or imagine living in a situation where you are poor and living in a violent neighborhood where you feel threatened regularly. Through studies, we now know that that type of stress is linked to higher potential for physical and mental illnesses such as autoimmune disorders, depression and anxiety later in life<sup>1</sup>. What we are starting to discover is that one of the main reasons for this is due to the damage that stress does to the gut and to the gastrointestinal microbiota.

Throughout the body there are trillions of bacteria and in the digestive system itself reside 3-4 pounds of bacteria that we call the gut microbiota. These 500 -1000 strains of bacteria are partly responsible for many processes including digestion, absorption, manufacturing vitamins, and helping improve immune system function. Research over the last decade is increasingly showing how the microbiota plays a key role in mental health as well.

Stress, trauma, poor diet, antibiotics, medications such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) and chemicals all can cause damage to the microbiota. When under extreme stress as a child, the microbiota can be damaged to the point of reducing the diversity of flora in the gut. Not only that but this can lead to lifelong damage to the microbiota. A lack of microbiota diversity is linked to greater levels of anxiety and depression and heightened inflammatory markers. The good news is that there are a number of things we can do to improve the health of the gut and to improve the microbiota. Through changes in our diet and adding key herbs the microbiota can be healed to help people feel better physically and emotionally. In essence, early childhood trauma can be treated in part by addressing digestive health.

## **The science**

Research is increasingly connecting the health of the gut to our emotional wellbeing. There are several areas of research going on. One is focusing on how the microbiome impacts our mood and researchers are discovering how certain bacteria can be beneficial for our mood. A recent study examined the microbiome of folks in urban Italy compared to traditional Hadza foragers in Tanzania<sup>2</sup>. What they discovered is that the Hadza's microbiome included a far more diverse array of bacteria while the Italians was far less diverse. Lacking healthy strains of bacteria is correlated with heightened levels of inflammation, anxiety, depression, autoimmune diseases and other health problems.

Think of it this way: If our microbiome is like a forest, traditional foragers have far more species of trees and plants in their forest while modern urban people have far less. We know from studying the environment that greater ecological diversity is a signpost of a healthier, stronger and more resilient ecosystem. And the more the environment leans towards less biodiversity, the more fragile it is. In essence, the modern person's microbiome is increasingly fragile and less resilient.

So why the difference in the microbiota between traditional foragers and modern people? There are a lot of potential culprits. The Western diet is far less diverse with about 20 ingredients, while traditional foragers ate upwards of 150 different ingredients. That complexity of diet actually leads to a greater need for different types of bacteria that can break down multiple types of food. Other culprits include the modern use of antibiotics, preservatives, chemicals and the pervasive effects of stress and trauma impacting our gut health and at times wiping out whole colonies of beneficial bacteria.

Add to that the potential for early childhood stress and trauma. Those stressors can also negatively impact the gut and lead to a lifelong change in the composition of the microbiota. Those damaging changes can lead to greater susceptibility to physical illnesses, anxiety and depression.

## **Tickle tickle**

So if beneficial bacteria are an important part of good mental health, what is the mechanism? How do they actually induce greater feelings of calm and wellbeing? Well there are a number of different pathways. One of the most interesting is that the bacteria are interacting with the ventral vagus nerve, the longest nerve that travels from the brain through to the heart and lungs all the

way to the digestive system. The Vagus nerve is connected to the parasympathetic nervous system and the ability to help the body to be calm, relax and digest. As part of the Gut-Brain axis<sup>3</sup>, certain strains of bacteria “tickle” nerve endings that then communicate through the vagus nerve to the areas of the brain associated with anxiety<sup>4</sup>.

Researchers have also discovered that mice that lack gastrointestinal bacteria (GF or Germ free) exhibit far higher levels of stress and anxiety. When those mice are fed on a broth that includes bacterial strains such as *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, they have much lower levels of anxiety. This type of bacteria produces Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), the main calmatative neurotransmitter in the body. This has led to research amongst veterans where they are conducting tests to see if beneficial bacteria can help reduce anxiety in veterans who have PTSD<sup>5</sup>. This is part of a larger framework of research that is looking at probiotics and certain strains of bacteria as forms of ‘psychobiotics’ that could influence the body to feel less anxiety and improve mood and wellbeing<sup>6</sup>.

### **Gut lining**

When talking about gut health, there is another area that is key to examine, and that is the intricate role of the lining of the gut. Leaky gut occurs when this thin mucosal lining is compromised and becomes inflamed and porous so that compounds normally contained in the digestive system ‘leak’ into the blood stream and then travel around the body, leading to systemic inflammation and various forms of illness and poorer mental health. Leaky gut is associated with chronic fatigue, food allergies, arthritis, autoimmune disorders and poor mood.

One of the main markers of inflammation is the over-secretion of inflammatory cytokines<sup>7</sup>. These inflammatory markers are much more elevated in folks who are having episodes of depression, anxiety, mania and psychosis. In the medical field there is some interest in prescribing anti-inflammatory drugs as a way of not only managing physical health concerns but mental health issues as well.

### **The big picture**

The field of psychiatry is changing. Traditionally the focus of treatment has been on augmenting or reducing certain neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin or GABA through drug therapy (think antidepressants and tranquilizers). But increasingly the field is broadening to integrate new research



into the health of the gut, the microbiota, the gut-brain axis, and inflammation as causative factors in poor mood and wellbeing. Though most mainstream medical doctors are still focused on prescribing traditional psychiatric medications, integrative practitioners have been focusing on the importance of gut health as part of improving mood and wellbeing. This is really a revolution in mental health that acknowledges the importance of not just the nervous system but our digestive system, what we eat, how we nourish ourselves and the health of our microbiota.

### **Why is our gut hurting?**

When considering how to heal the gut its key to look at the variety of factors that could be contributing:

**Diet:** One of the first things to consider is what you are already eating. So many digestive disturbances can be healed by reducing/eliminating processed foods, ‘quick carbs’, sugars, and common allergic foods such as wheat and dairy. Moving to simple easy to digest warm meals filled with broths and traditional meals made with grains and vegetables can also be amazingly healing and often essential to really eliminate symptoms.

**Stress:** So obvious it barely needs mentioning but when we become overwhelmed by obligations, family, relationship or job problems, it takes a toll on our gut. Our ability to digest and eliminate properly gets easily affected and this can come out as increased loose stools, constipation, inflammation and other factors. Working through stressors is key to help reduce the load on the gut.

**Previous trauma:** Trauma in the form of emotional abuse, violence, neglect and other stressors can have a lasting impact on our body and our microbiota.

Bessel Van Der Kolk, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, states “*Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves.*”

Working through this held felt tension in the body and the gut can often be helped by somatic therapies such as yoga, qi gong, dance and trauma release exercises. Traditionally, indigenous people often work through trauma via ceremony, healing rituals and community reintegration that help to release this held/felt tension.

**Oppression:** We live in a world where large groups of people are oppressed by low wages, substandard housing, lack of access to good healthcare, good food and adequate school systems. This leads to a chronic toll on the body that is often felt in the gut in the form of inflammation, a damaged microbiota and poor digestion that then translates into worsening mood and wellbeing. There are no easy answers to this as it requires systemic approaches to dismantle the widespread oppression that affects billions of people.

**Drugs/Alcohol/Medication:** All forms of medications, drugs and alcohol can have an adverse effect on the gut and tend to slow down and damage digestion. It's key to particularly note that antibiotics and NSAIDS are deeply damaging to gut health and their frequency of administration is often excessive.

### **In come the plants**

When we think about ways to heal the digestive system, the most common way that humans have traditionally done this is to use herbs. Herbs are amazing healers for the gut and work on a number of levels. They can act as anti-inflammatories, nourish and strengthen, promote digestive flow, relax the stomach to help it digest better, improve metabolism and heal the gut lining. Let's take a closer look at all the amazing things herbs can do.

### **Aromatics**

These are herbs that you likely already have in your spice cabinet or growing on your back deck and are known as aromatic carminatives. A carminative herb is one that helps ease digestion and has an uplifting, dispersing quality. They help when there is stagnation, heaviness, difficulty in digestion and absorption, tend to relax the digestive system and are antispasmodic when there is cramping. They have volatile oils that give these herbs their distinct aroma and are often turned into essential oils that can be used for aromatherapy as well. They often have an added function of being calming and uplifting. This can be especially important for folks who have a lot of stress or who have experienced trauma and are tight and are holding in their bellies.

They include the Mediterranean herbs such as mint, sage, rosemary, oregano, fennel and thyme as well as the more warming Middle Eastern/South Asian aromatics such as ginger, cardamom, nutmeg, coriander and turmeric.

These are some of the best go-to herbs for people with digestive problems as they tend to be gentle, easy to digest and can be easily added to meals.

## Bitters

We don't get much bitter food into our modern diet and this is one of the reasons for poor digestion. Outside of coffee and the occasional piece of kale, bitter is fairly lacking. The bitter taste helps things to move and the direction is downward (unless you take a huge amount - then it can be emetic.) These are herbs that help promote digestive function, improve bile flow and help in the process of assimilation and elimination. Traditionally bitter plants have been associated with improving liver function. In Chinese medicine, a stagnant liver is correlated with stored and stuck frustration and anger. The bitter flavor helps us to feel less stuck and angry and feel like our energy is more easy and free flowing. Some classic bitter herbs include the roots of dandelion, chicory, burdock, yellow dock, bupleurum, angelica as well as the reishi and fomitopsis mushrooms.

## Demulcents

These are herbs that help calm and soothe inflamed digestive systems and are especially helpful for those with ulcers, gastritis and heartburn or chronic constipation. Some examples include calendula, licorice, meadowsweet, marshmallow, slippery elm, and plantain.

## Polysaccharide Rich “Sweet” herbs

In an important article from *Nature*, studies were done on ginseng and how it can help restore the gut microbiota<sup>8</sup>. Ginseng has a high composition of polysaccharides that act similar to prebiotics to stimulate the growth of lactobacillus and Bacteroides spp. There are a number of ‘sweet’ Chinese herbs that are regularly used to enhance digestive health. They are often included in formulas such as 6 gentlemen and Gui pi tang. Interestingly these herbs are also associated with strengthening the ‘qi’ or the overall feeling of energy in the body. Essentially, healing the gut leads to greater feelings of vitality and energy. Examples include ginseng, codonopsis, astragalus, dong gui and licorice.



## **Astringents**

These are herbs that are helpful for toning up the digestive lining and helping with loose bowels and diarrhea. Examples include red raspberry leaf, yarrow, strawberry leaf and geranium.

## **Nutritional**

These are herbs that provide an enormous amount of vitamins and minerals and include herbs such as nettles, oat straw, alfalfa, seaweeds, moringa and red clover.

## **Liver healers**

There are a number of herbs that are particularly useful for healing the liver when there has been damage such as in the case of alcoholism and hepatitis C. These include milk thistle, reishi, fomitopsis and schisandra.

## **Steps towards healing the gut**

As we see from research there is increasing evidence that anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions are strongly correlated with gut health. And we are learning that when the microbiota is damaged or with increased inflammation in the gut lining we can develop a wide range of both physical and emotional complaints.

Though each person's digestive issues are unique and require specific care, there are some general herbal protocols that can be helpful for most people. Here are some of my basic recommendations:

**1. Reduce irritating foods.** These often include coffee, sugar, processed foods, chocolate, tobacco as well as common allergens such as wheat, dairy and nightshades. These are the low hanging fruits that can be reduced to help improve gut health and in turn improve mood. It's also key to avoid cold foods that damage the gut. That means avoid ice, raw salads and frozen foods and beverages.

**2. Increase food and herbs in the diet that promote digestion and absorption.** One of the bestways to do this is by eating fermented foods in the form of miso, kombucha, kimchi and sauerkraut. Fermented foods act as prebiotics to promote certain bacterial strains that are beneficial to the microbiota. It's also great to add herbs to the diet that include the aromatic herbs listed above. That means add herbs such as fennel, tarragon, ginger and

cardamom to your meals. Your tummy will love you. Bitter herbs are also really helpful in promoting digestive juices and better digestion and absorption. Some examples include dandelion, burdock, yellow dock and gentian. See below for more detailed information.

**3. Eat slow.** The more work we do with our teeth, the less work our digestive system has to do. In general we eat faster and eat too much when we are watching TV, are on the computer and phone. Try to take a break from the screens while eating.

**4. Lower the stress.** If you are stressed, your gut will freeze up and won't have the motility needed to digest and absorb food. Lowering stress levels can be next to impossible for some folks, especially for folks who have to work multiple jobs or have poor housing. But even small changes can be key to reducing stress and in turn taking a load off our gut.

**5. Move.** The human species is one that traditionally has lived mostly outdoors and involved in foraging and hunting. That means that a portion of the day was always spent moving outside. Movement helps the digestive system to flow and improves motility and peristaltic function. Try 30-60 minutes of outdoor gentle movement a day such as walking, hiking, biking, qi gong and yoga. Heavy exercise can also place serious stress on the digestive system so be careful of those daily spin classes.

**6. Nourish.** There are a lot of articles and books about what diet is best for people who are trying to repair and heal the gut. From Paleo to Vegan, often what is missed is that it can be really hard for people to digest food and its best to try and take in warm food in small amounts that are easy to digest. So think well cooked meals and soups that emphasize whole foods. While reducing processed foods, simple carbs and sugar is often key to healing the gut, a paleo diet that emphasizes big pieces of red meat and raw salads can be tremendously hard for some people to digest. Embracing traditional diets from throughout the world is often key to healing the gut as well. *Nourishing Traditions* and *Nourishing Broth* by Sally Fallon are two of my favorite go-to books that will go a long way to improving and healing gut related health issues.

Choosing which herbs to use and how to use them as part of a protocol for nourishing and healing the gut can be challenging to know. The thing I like to keep in mind is that the gut generally likes to deal with things as simple warm liquids. Pills, capsules, powders and alcohol tinctures are harder to consume and absorb. So with that in mind I like to promote people taking in broths and teas primarily.

## **Gut healing recipes**

Here are a few recipes for herbal preparations that can be consumed regularly to improve digestion and gut health.

**Digest Ease Tea:** This is especially helpful for reducing stomach cramping, relaxing the belly and helping people to digest their meals.

- 1 tablespoon of mint
- 1 teaspoon of fennel

Add herbs to one pint of hot water and let steep for 10 minutes and then strain and drink.

**Warm the Tummy Tea:** For those who feel cold, stagnant, bloated and tight in the belly, sometimes with pain and distension.

- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 1 teaspoon cardamom
- A pinch of licorice

Add herbs to one pint of hot water and let steep for 10 minutes and then strain and drink.

**Nourish the Stomach Tea:** This is an herbal combination that can be taken over a longer period of time (4 - 6 weeks) on a daily basis when the gut has been compromised and there are feelings of bloating, distension, fatigue, low energy, poor sleep, aches and depression. This is a classic 'spleen qi tonic' with Chinese herbs. It's really important to make this as a tea (decoction) because several of these herbs (astragalus, codonopsis, ginseng) contain polysaccharides that break down into probiotics that promote healthy gut flora.

- 1 tablespoon of codonopsis
- 5 sticks of astragalus
- 1 teaspoon orange peel
- 1 teaspoon Hawthorn berries
- 1 teaspoon Dong quai
- 1/2 teaspoon Licorice
- 1/2 teaspoon Ginger

Add herbs to a quart of water in a pot. Then bring to a boil and let simmer for 30 minutes. Strain and drink over the day.

**Heal the Gut lining Tea:** These are herbs that are known as ‘vulneraries’. That means they help heal inflamed and damaged tissue. Add equal parts of these herbs: Calendula, meadowseweet, plantain, chamomile and licorice and place them in their own jar for regular use.

Then take a tablespoon of the herb and add it to a pint of hot water. Steep for 15 minutes and then strain and drink.

**Calm Digestion Tea:** This is a useful combo for those who are so anxious and nervous that they are unable to digest food very well.

- Catnip 1 teaspoon
- Chamomile 1 teaspoon
- Peppermint 1 teaspoon
- Passionflower 1 teaspoon

Add herbs to pint of hot water. Steep for 10 minutes with lid on the tea and then strain and drink.

**Tone the Tummy Tea:** This is useful for folks who have been having loose stools and diarrhea and need some astringent, vulnerary and calmative herbs.

- Red raspberry leaf 2 teaspoons
- Yarrow 1 teaspoon
- Chamomile 1 teaspoon

Add herbs to pint of hot water. Steep for 10 minutes with lid on the tea and then strain and drink.

**Reduce Inflamed Stomach Tea:** This is for folks who have been getting heartburn and acid reflux. Try a cup of marshmallow root tea. This is a mucilaginous tea that will help soothe, cool and heal the stomach.

- 1 tablespoon marshmallow root
- 1 teaspoon catnip
- 1 teaspoon mint

Place herbs in a pint of cold water (yes cold water) and allow to steep for a few hours or overnight. Strain and drink.

### **Nourishing long infusions**

Often our digestive system is faring poorly because it is lacking in needed

nutrients for proper metabolism, digestion and absorption. There are a number of herbs that are nutrient rich such as nettles, oat straw, moringa, red clover, cacao and seaweeds. One of the best ways to nourish the system deeply is to drink infusions of herbs that have been steeped for many hours. Try one herb a day (nettles, red clover, oat straw) for a few weeks to see if your energy levels are improved. Take one cup of herb and place in a quart mason jar. Fill to the top with hot water and let sit for four hours or overnight. Then strain and drink throughout the day.

### **Before meal ‘bitters’**

Traditionally in Europe, bitter plants in the form of a liqueur or tincture were offered before meals to help stimulate salivation and digestive juices. They often include herbs such as dandelion, chicory, burdock and yellow dock. Urban Moonshine sells some lovely bitters that I like and you can sample from a few varieties. You can also purchase tinctures of bitter herbs from places like Herbpharm that include herbs such as burdock root, artichoke leaf and gentian rhizome. Try taking 30 drops of the tincture before a meal to help improve digestion.

### **Golden Milk**

This is an ancient Indian recipe for reducing inflammation and help in improving digestion. It includes turmeric, ginger, black pepper and cinnamon, all nice warming aromatics that help improve digestive juices and stimulate blood flow. This is a nice and warming beverage that is best suited for people who are already a little cold, tight and stagnant.

- 1 teaspoon turmeric root
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger root
- Pinch of black pepper
- Cinnamon stick
- 1 cup milk (fatty milk such as coconut, almond or cow)
- 1 cup water

Add ingredients to milk and water in a pan. Blend ingredients with a whisk and bring to low heat (not boil) and simmer for 10 minutes. Strain and drink.

### **Conclusion**

Traditionally a healthy digestive system has been linked to good energy



levels, feeling calm, bright and resilient. When we think of trauma and ongoing neglect and abuse in childhood, it's key to understand that digestive health was likely compromised at that time and that it's essential to examine digestive system health as part of the road to healing. Healing the gut can be instrumental in healing the underlying physical wounds of trauma that can be carried to adulthood in the form of a damaged microbiota, poor digestion, inflammation, fatigue, autoimmune disorders, anxiety and depression. By building a stronger and healthier digestive system, it is easier to adapt to stress and build the deep resiliency needed to heal from trauma.

*Jon Keyes is a Licensed Professional Counselor and herbalist.*

*[www.Hearthsidehealing.com](http://www.Hearthsidehealing.com). You can find the original article with further links and resources at: <https://www.hearthsidehealing.com/articles/trauma-the-gut-and-healing-building-deep-resiliency/>*

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# **PART 3:**

# **POLICE VIOLENCE**

## INTRODUCTION TO POLICE VIOLENCE

Police violence is probably what first comes to mind when someone says ‘state violence’, because the police are often the most visible apparatus of the state. They appear on the news a lot, television is filled with crime drama shows, children’s animations involve cute dogs acting as cops - symbols of police are absolutely everywhere in our lives. And for people who are relentlessly criminalised, police are often the daily bane of someone’s existence. For refugees living in Calais, France, they are subject to near-daily evictions of their tents and belongings facing constant beatings and harassment from police, for homeless people they are moved on or repeatedly arrested, for people who use drugs they are hypervigilant through daily life, for Black and Brown teenagers they know an invasive stop and search is round the corner, for Black people in the US they literally know this could be the day they die at the hands of the police. These are just a few examples of the many iterations of police violence around the world.

When police brutality hits the headlines, the same news cycle repeats about reforming the police. Like prisons, and the state in general, police are deemed natural, normal and necessary to the point that we cannot imagine a world without them. Liberals demand the removal of a few bad apples, while abolitionists articulate that it’s the whole system that is rotten. The key point here is that the police are structurally and systematically embedded in the defence of the state to maintain power and oppress populations. Every movement working for social change will come up against them and their protection of certain classes of people and their interests. Whether this is being physically repressed at demonstrations, or being infiltrated by undercover police who survey and sabotage groups that threaten the state.

Many people’s awareness of police violence emerged during the 2020 uprising following the murder of George Floyd. In writing how many people were shocked by this violence, author of *Abolishing State Violence*, Ray Acheson writes how this level of violence is in fact long-standing:

*“The show of overwhelming and violent force from police, backed by the National Guard and threats by the US president to deploy the military and shoot protestors, may have appeared shocking to some, but is rooted in long-standing and ongoing patterns of racist police brutality. This brutality is a fixture of the US carceral, militarist, and imperialist systems. The “band*

*of brothers” in blue, much like the military, is part of the apparatus of coercive state power designed and deployed to maintain the privileges of the elite. Borne through the enclosure of the commons, shaped by settler colonialism, raised by slavery and segregation, trained by military operations abroad, and reinforced through the rise of the prison industrial complex and border imperialism, US policing is a key node in the network of the “national security state,” which relies on perpetual war abroad and oppression at home to sustain itself. This is not an issue of individual police officers, good or bad. This is an issue of structure: of systemic racism and a culture of militarism within policing as a whole.”<sup>1</sup>*

The story of the creation and formation of the police on different continents is a whole book in itself. Whatever the origins, whether it is people working as slave catchers in the Southern US, or the arresting of peasants stealing to feed themselves throughout the counties of Britain, over hundreds of years, police forces have been refined and developed to master the art of control and repression. Similarly, propaganda has been crafted over the years to convince populations that we need police for our safety.

Abolitionist and former prisoner, Angela Davis, says *“The evolution and expansion of the police and the prisons are constant reminders that capitalism has always fundamentally relied on racism to sustain itself.”*

The police are intrinsic to capitalism through their protection of state and capitalist interests, whether that’s arresting shoplifters or evicting squatters, pushing away boats of migrants or raiding businesses looking for people to detain and deport.

*“Across the world, people who have been deliberately marginalized by the state — disenfranchised, dispossessed, discriminated against on the basis of race, color, caste, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, and more—experience police as an oppressive force, the primary task of which is to maintain the political, economic, and social order.”*

- Ray Acheson, *Abolishing State Violence*<sup>2</sup>

But do police keep us safe? What about the rapists and the paedophiles? These are super important questions that abolitionists have been exploring answers to for decades. Movements have emerged with all kinds of initiatives that aim to respond to harm.

Generation Five, whose mission is to end the sexual abuse of children within

five generations, are a great example.<sup>3</sup> They've worked with children, survivors of abuse, communities and movements to create models of transformative justice, where abuse is prevented through community care and attention, where survivors are recognised and heard and where space is given for perpetrators of harm to address their behaviour.

There are many groups worldwide working on building community safety and rejecting the idea that policing, imprisonment, isolation and state violence are the answer to social problems (which themselves are nearly always created by the state, capitalism and patriarchy.)



To learn more about these ideas of abolition, please check out the resources section of the book for some recommended books and projects that have been organising around these issues for decades.

## References

1. Acheson, R. (2022) *Abolishing state violence: A world beyond bombs, borders, and cages*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
2. *Ibid.*
3. [https://transformharm.org/tj\\_resource/addressing-trauma-generation-5/](https://transformharm.org/tj_resource/addressing-trauma-generation-5/)

## HERBAL MUTUAL AID DURING POLICE VIOLENCE

This part of the book is looking at herbal responses to police violence. We explore:

- The role of herbal street medics at demonstrations, uprisings, and altercations with the police where people may be harmed or injured.
- Key points on herbal first aid aftercare for all who have experienced police violence including:
  - Herbs and protocols to detox from chemical weapons exposure
  - Liver support
  - Respiratory support
  - Immunity support
  - Remedies for bumps, bruises, burns, taser and handcuff injuries
- Some of the herbal initiatives that emerged during the 2020 George Floyd uprising where herbal care packages were distributed in solidarity with Black communities experiencing the worst of racialised police violence
- Herbal support at sites of long-term occupations and sites of resistance including the Stop HS2 camps, as an example of the role of herbal solidarity in supporting people living through these challenging conditions
- Advice on how to respond to a herbal call to action

I love the creativity of herbalists and how they've been called to support communities of resistance. I hope this chapter inspires many more initiatives such as these, so that they are not a one-time event in response to an uprising, but a consistent flow of herbal care to all those experiencing police violence while we work to create the world anew.

## AN OVERVIEW OF HERBAL STREET MEDIC RESOURCES

### **Becoming a Herbal Street Medic**

Being a street medic/action medic/riot medic has a certain glamour to it. It has the impression of being adrenaline-filled, exciting and, dare I say, it is a bit heroic in nature. It can be a fast-paced contrast to things like medicine making or seeing people one to one in a herbal clinic. However, I think the reality is quite different.

It's certainly different depending on the country and context - in Palestine, at demonstrations in the West Bank, there is likely to be gas grenades, rubber bullets and even live ammunition. In the United States, medics may be hypervigilant around attacks from fascists and gunshot wounds. In France, police weaponry is increasingly causing fatalities and lost limbs.

Every country has a different culture of street actions and street resistance. The reality may actually be lots of gruelling hard work on your feet, many hours accompanying folks in hospital, exposure to police violence and arrest yourself, and risk of traumatic stress. There is also another reality that I think is hidden behind the glamour and the kit and medical gear (that street medics swoon over), which is actually that it can be really boring. Remember, if you're a bored medic on a demo it's actually a great thing. I've lost count of how many times I've gone to demonstrations with my medic kit and nothing has happened. Or what we've had to deal with are actually 'mundane' health needs like blisters.

I remember working as a medic at a G7 mobilisation in Cornwall, as a team with Bristol Action Medics. We had prepped for all scenarios - bottles of water stacked high in my van in case of pepper spray or gas, bandages and dressings of all kinds and on and on. Surrounded by hundreds of police for a small group of people, street actions were effectively stunted before they started. The adrenaline of some kind of altercation with the cops faded, and what happened? We were basically sun lotion dispensers. Everyone came ill-prepared and people were getting burnt under the Cornish summer sun. Likewise, a few people got heatstroke. At the space at the protest camp, I had drawers of herbal medicines I'd brought along too. And folks hobbled up with a sprained ankle on their way to the minor injuries unit. Here my bruise ointment bought needed pain relief.

So being a medic isn't always sexy or exciting, not every demo you go on will be filled with people being beaten with truncheons and gassed. But you are there to be ready for any emergency and any medical situation. And this attentiveness to more everyday conditions or health needs should not be minimised, the way that feminised caring labour is commonly undervalued and invisibilised.

So definitely learn medic skills, prep solid kits and organise with a crew so you can meet people's needs, but also have some humble expectations and take the responsibility seriously because you literally never know what will happen (including not much on many occasions).

## **Training**

Working as a herbalist medic, the 'medic' part has to be prioritised as much as the herbal side. Many people have existing skills as nurses and paramedics and EMTs (emergency medical technicians), and then complement these with their herbal medicine training and knowledge. For folks not from a conventional medical background, it is essential to get some training in first aid and ideally emergency pre-hospital care.

When people see a little red cross patch on your rucksack or medic bib, they will expect you to have first aid skills. I am 100% supportive of self education and DIY skill sharing and education, and if you have an experienced medic collective that can do this training that's awesome. However, if this isn't available, or even if it is, complementing this with conventional first aid training is super important.

I cannot speak to training in other countries, but I would say the general best advice is to find a provider that seems practically experienced and is qualified themselves (for example, they are working as a paramedic). And looking for a recognised qualification is valuable. In the UK, there are basic 'First Aid at Work' courses which are generally day-long courses that cover the very basics of things like CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

I'd strongly encourage anyone wanting to do street medic work who is based in the UK to invest in a FREC course (First Response Emergency Care). FREC 3 is a 5 day course with 35 hours of tuition and then extra assignments making it 53 total learning hours. This is what most people who work as emergency care assistants on ambulances in the UK will have as their foundational training. FREC 4 is another five day course but with more workbooks to complete and more assessments through the week. It's a total of 180 learning hours. It will



cement everything learnt at FREC 3 and give you much more confidence with clinical scenarios.

These courses can be a challenge because they are expensive. Also, you're likely to be studying alongside men that work in private security services, former soldiers or even cops. So expect a lot of mansplaining and fancy watches! I've actually walked out of a FREC 3 course before because of racism in the group. For FREC 4, going along with a close friend made all the difference and meant we could pair up more, and debrief from the course together. Another option is organising your own FREC course amongst a group of comrades and then paying the trainer together collectively.

### **Other helpful online courses include:**

- Herbal Medics Academy - big variety of courses available including herbal first aid, wound management, austere medicine and more - <https://herbalmedics.academy/>
- Emergent Responder courses with the Commonwealth School of Herbalism - they have two courses on Community Disaster Response: First Aid and Long Term Care and Emergency Clinic Management that I've taken which I'd highly recommend - <https://online.commonwealthherbs.com/bundles/emergent-responder/>
- Street Medic Bridge Training - This is a two hour online training for people with existing medical training - <https://www.donoharmcoalition.org/street-medic-training.html>

### **Books, Guides & Handouts**

Most conventional first aid training is going to be assuming there is access to higher definitive care for example calling ambulances. It's not going to be teaching you as if you're in the middle of a street battle with the police. Therefore, it's really great to study up with other resources that have emerged from movements themselves.

#### *Riot Medicine, Håkan Geijer*

One of the most comprehensive resources to date (a whopping 466 pages). A huge manual on pre-action planning, training, medicine, equipment, tactics and so much more. The only sad thing about the book is a few ill-informed paragraphs about herbal medicine that reproduces prejudice about herbalism.

However, other than this I think it is essential reading and a solid self-study guide. <https://riotmedicine.net/>

*Street Medic Handbook*, Chicago Action Medical

From 2013 but a foundational 93-page text on all aspects of street medic work. <https://solidarityapothecary.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Street-Medic-Handbook-Chicago-Action-Medical-2013.pdf>

*Street Medic Guide*, Paper Revolution

The website collates many resources including a Street Medic guide.

<https://www.paperrevolution.org/street-medic-guide/>

*From France with Gloves*

A resource from a French street medic that introduces the various weapons used by the French police, how to protect yourself from them the best you can, how to treat people who have been injured and what to pack in your medic kit. Also recorded as a podcast as Episode 38 of the Frontline Herbalism Podcast.

<https://solidarityapothecary.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/From-France-with-gloves.pdf>

Atlanta Resistance Medics Library

A solid library of texts and resources.

<https://atlantaresistancemedics.wordpress.com/the-library/books-pamphlets-zines-and-more/>

Herbalista First Aid Resources

A collection of resources on herbal first aid including links to many other resources. <https://herbalista.org/resources/handouts/>

*Herbal First Aid Handout*, Dedj Leibbrandt

Dedj is a qualified nurse, paramedic and herbalist with decades of experience in herbal first aid. I have been mentored by Dedj who has worked as our Clinical Supervisor in Calais. This handout contains her tried and tested responses to many acute conditions.

<https://solidarityapothecary.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Herbal->

## [First-Aid-Dedj-Leibbrandt-2.pdf](#)

*Herbal First Aid*, Greta de la Montagne

A 24-page handout with clinical red flags, herbs listed for common ailments, dental first aid and more.

<https://solidarityapothecary.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Montagne-Herbal-First-Aid-NOTES.pdf>

7Song's Handouts

7Song is a herbalist with 30+ years experience including running a free clinic and doing first aid for large groups. His website has abundant first aid and herbal handouts, as well as links to training on YouTube.

<https://7song.com/resources/>

*Activists Guide to Basic First Aid*, Black Cross Collective

A simple zine on protest first aid, including what to wear and not to wear.

<https://www.sproutdistro.com/catalog/zines/direct-action/activists-guide-to-basic-first-aid/>

*A demonstrators guide to responding to gunshot wounds*, Crimethinc

A simple zine on how to respond to gunshot wounds, what to pack, etc.

<https://mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/demonstrators-guide-to-responding-to-gunshot-wounds-imposed.pdf>

Safe Protest Tips

A compilation of resources on how to ensure your safety and the safety of others during protests, demonstrations, and other direct action.

<https://www.safeprotest.tips/>

*Alternatives to Emergency Medical Services*, Rosehip Medic Collective

A zine about work towards accountable, non-oppressive, and community-driven alternatives to police forces.

<https://mutualaiddisasterreliefsite.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/alt2emsdigitalprintmay9.pdf>

## Podcasts & Videos

Medical Self Defense Network podcast series

Hosted on the Frontline Herbalism Podcast, the series contains ten interviews with different medics worldwide and their various projects. There are practical episodes on responding to gun shot wounds, riot medicine in France and more. Episodes 31 - 40. <https://solidarityapothecary.org/podcast/>

7Song YouTube channel

Several videos released in 2020 for a herbal street medic training, plus other interesting herbalism videos. <https://www.youtube.com/@7Songsevensong>

Street Medic webinar

2 hour webinar by Community Alternatives to 911

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGjVCiVq47M>

Virtual Street Medic training

Led by organisers with the Justice Center in El Barrio, East Harlem.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RIkHTDQ2fc>



## *Contribution:* STREET ACTION CARE KIT LIST

*Herbalista*

This is a listing for creating a simple herbal first aid kit for marches or protests. It is small and compact and meant to care for yourself and your friends or the group you are with. It is not intended for remote locations or long term actions, with different considerations. While it contains the basics for trauma care, it focuses a lot on emotional support and holistic self-care.

This kit is based on Lorna's personal one, so please customize it to your needs and the tools you feel most comfortable working with.

### **Be prepared - stay healthy!**

Being well rested, hydrated, nourished, and in a prepared mental state are paramount! Taking to the streets and raising your voice for justice brings light to very dark places. The more centered we are in our bodies and hearts, the harder it is to knock us off course. Here are some suggestions by the Boston Area Liberation Medics (BALM)<sup>1</sup> for staying healthy so you can stay in the streets. It includes suggestions for before, during, and after an action. It covers concerns ranging from what to wear and bring, to chemical weapons and plastic handcuffs.

### **First Aid Kit Creation**

What do you need to pack? You will want remedies for:

- Common injuries associated with just being out and about in general - sprained ankle, scrapes, blisters, dehydration, etc.
- The strain of protest - stress and anxiety, headaches, digestive upset, heartburn, hoarse voices, etc.
- Environmental concerns - what's the weather like? Is it hot and sunny (sunscreen, electrolytes), cold and wet (immune support), buggy (bite remedies, spray).

- Risk of violence - it takes courage to raise our voices for change. Sometimes there is violence. Let's do our best to include remedies to promote and spread calm. Find your local street medic collective and consider street medic training if you would like to learn more about traumatic and chemical injury, dealing with arrest, etc.
- What are your personal health needs? Where could you use extra support? Who are your herbal allies? How do you go out of balance when times get stressful? Make sure to pack those needed items.
- The list seems long, but quantities and sizes are kept small. You aren't packing for a week of support, but for a short march or action, and you can refill your kit each day as needed. Many of these remedies are multipurpose i.e. lavender essential oil, wound care, anxiety, burns, etc.
- Pack your tinctures in 15 ml bottles with built in droppers (like an essential oil bottle) for easy use. Get your duct tape without the cardboard tube. Bring only 1-2 of each tea bag. Pack things into your kit in an organized way so it is easy to find what you need quickly. Use mini plastic bags to keep things sorted and easy to access.

### **Kit Checklist**

Don't forget your own personal needs like water, energy bar/ snack, sunscreen, etc. Encourage your friends to remember to pack their basics as well!

#### **General Supplies**

- Pocket First Aid Guide
- Disposable Gloves - non latex
- Mask or Bandana
- Head Lamp
- Sharpie
- Duct Tape - mini, without cardboard tube
- Ace Wrap
- Trauma Shears
- Alcohol Swabs and Povidone Iodine Swabs
- Propolis or Myrrh Tincture, *Commiphora molmol* (15ml)
- Band-Aids (standard, large, fingertip)

#### **Wound and Trauma Care**

- Wound care Tape (Medipore)
- Athletic Tape (zinc oxide)
- Vet Wrap (2")/ Gauze Roll
- Non-stick Gauze ( 4x4)
- Sterile Gauze (4x4)
- Woven Gauze (absorbent)
- Moleskin for blisters
- Triangle Bandage(s)

- Tweezers and Safety Pins
- Inflamm Re-Leaf Capsules (Turmeric, etc.)
- Arnica 30c Homeopathic
- NSAID (Aspirin, Ibuprofen, etc.)
- Pain Re-Leaf Salve
- Basic Wound Salve
- Zinc Oxide Cream Packets
- Burn Gel Packets (Alocaine)
- Chest Rub/ Olbas - use for muscle strains
- Saline (Single Serve)

### **Stress, Anxiety and Pain**

- Lavender essential oil (15 ml) - also for burns, bug bites
- Anemone Tincture, *Anemone pulsatilla* (15ml) \*\* Low dose botanical
- Rescue Remedy
- Nervine Tincture Blend (15ml) - lots of variations i.e. skullcap, mimosa, milky oats, etc
- Rose water spritzer (1 oz) - can

also be used for wound care

### **Respiratory**

- Chest Rub or Olbas Essential Oil
- Cough Drops
- Lobelia, *Lobelia inflata* (15ml) - \*\* Low dose herb
- Throat Coat Tea Bag
- Breathe Easy Tea Bag

### **Hydration**

- Electrolyte Packets
- Emergen-C Packets
- Instant Miso Packet

### **Digestion**

- Sugar Ginger Chews
- Activated Charcoal Capsules
- Spirit of Peppermint (15ml)
- DGL's - Deglycyrrhizinated Licorice wafers
- Imodium
- Chamomile Tea Bags - also for anxiety, also as compress for wound care

*The Herbalista Health Network recognizes healthcare as a fundamental human right and works to protect health access through clinical services and educational opportunities. We strive for a community based model of healthCARE that is based on solidarity and not charity. Learn more about the variety of Herbalista projects at <https://herbalista.org>*

### **References**

1. <https://www.bostoncoop.net/~balm/>

*Contribution:*

## KEY POINTS ON HERBAL FIRST AID AFTERCARE FOR ALL WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED POLICE VIOLENCE

*Dixie Pauline, Greta Montagne, Dana Aronson,  
Ingrid Bauer, Jocelyn Laurel Pena*

### **Introduction: Plant Medicine for Resilience**

Humans and plants have an interwoven relationship extending far back into our history. Our bodies have evolved in constant conversation with plants, developing receptor sites for chemicals only the plants produce. When we turn to plants for healing, we access a strength much bigger than our species. Now more than ever, humanity needs the healing power of medicinal plants.

This guide focuses on care after experiencing police violence using plant medicines that are complementary to the protocols set forth by street medic networks. For basic first aid skills and in-the-street treatment please reference street medic publications and consider taking a Street Medic training near you.

The medicines referenced here are found in most of our kitchens, are easy to grow, drought tolerant, abundant, or readily available at your local herb or health food stores. Endangered or at-risk plants are not included. Note that the information we've provided is one a snapshot of each of these herbs which are dynamic beings and do a lot more for us than what we've presented to you.

### **Disclaimer**

- The statements, remedies, and techniques described herein are not meant to diagnose, prescribe, or treat any disease or substitute medical care by a licensed health care practitioner.
- Don't forego common sense and prevention, such as wearing a mask, washing your hands, and following street medic guidelines for avoiding and preventing injury during protests.
- Don't delay or forgo necessary medical treatment. Follow all public health recommendations, and when in doubt, seek guidance and care through



established channels. Know your scope of practice and respect your limits. If you don't know an herb, read or ask about it before using it. Ask permission before offering others any kind of treatment.

- Don't ignore side-effects, contraindications, or herb-drug interactions when using herbs and supplements. This includes taking possibly harmful doses of otherwise generally safe substances. Herbs work, more is not always better. Pregnant people should approach herbal remedies with as much caution as allopathic remedies.

- Always listen to what feels right in your body.

### **Legal considerations**

Anyone who is injured at a protest or in jail needs to document their injury promptly and well, and work with your local grassroots legal team if there is one. Exercise caution when using your phone or camera. The police can seize it and subpoena you for your photos and videos.

Don't expect protection from police violence while wearing a Red Cross or providing first aid care. Quite the opposite - medics have been targets because of our ability to spread calm and mitigate the fear of chemical weapons. If you are in a position where arrest or injury would put you at greater risk due to your health, documentation, or other status, consider avoiding the front line and offering aftercare to those who need it. This is a vital service for the long term health of movements, and is the focus of most of this document.

## **HERBAL PROTOCOLS FOR CHEMICAL WEAPONS EXPOSURE**

### **Pepper Spray and Tear Gas**

Exposure to 'incapacitating agents' such as tear gas and pepper spray could potentially lead to lingering health problems. The toxins from the chemical weapons can stick around in our bodies, disrupting menstrual cycles, taxing our living, endocrine, and immune systems. Additionally, these agents may damage the protective lining of the lungs, which can make us more susceptible to lung infections and diseases. Damage to the eyes is possible especially if the person was wearing contact lenses at the time of exposure.

If exposed, help your body to eliminate the toxins as quickly and effectively as possible in order to minimise the long term effects.

### **Immediate steps to decontaminate:**

**Support your body's innate ability to detoxify.** The liver, kidneys, lymph and skin are the main organs that carry off body wastes. The following plant remedies and other protocols will support them all simultaneously, appropriate for detoxification.

**Wash your hands** including getting underneath your nails. Remove contacts. Gargle to remove possible residues in your mouth or throat. (This is especially important if you might have been exposed to a viral respiratory infection. Repeat 2 - 3x daily with warm salt water). Do not bring your contaminated clothes and other items inside. Be careful what you touch, put everything into a trash bag and seal until it is ready to be washed. Do not put clothes in the dryer. If items have a lingering odour like chemicals, clean them again.

**Cold shower first!** Your skin is your largest organ. It is important to first cleanse it by taking a cold shower first so that you don't open up your pores to more chemicals. Castile soap or baby shampoo is best. Be careful of lingering chemicals in hair contaminating the water and running into eyes.

**Hydrate!** Drinking adequate water is the most important action you can do for your overall health. Make sure you're consuming enough water to urinate 8 times a day. Most people need at least 2 quarts/litres on a normal day, so add 50% more to your regime when preparing for or recuperating from exposure. Rather than guzzle all at once, sip consistently throughout the day for proper absorption. This will have the added benefit of keeping your mucous membranes adequately moist which is our first line of defence against viral infections. Squeeze lemon in your water for added benefit. Tip: simply drinking herbal tea supports your kidneys and overall health.

**Replace your electrolytes.** Electrolytes are the electrically charged minerals that our bodies need to conduct normal biochemical functions, maintaining an electric voltage throughout our cells so that signals can pass easily. Sweating causes you to lose electrolytes. As we age, our ability to balance electrolytes wanes.

**Epsom salt scrub then bath:** After you've taken a cold shower (see above), a hot shower followed by a thorough scrubbing with Epsom salts left on the skin for 10-15 minutes before a follow-up wash can help draw toxins from the body. For a bath, use Epsom salts or sea salts and soak for only 10 minutes. Toxins your body has eliminated during the soak will be reabsorbed after that time. Be sure to accompany this with much water consumption.

**Oatmeal for irritated skin.** Place the oatmeal in the sock or nylon and tie or secure with a rubber band. Plop in the bath occasionally squeezing the sock to release as much of the oatmeal starch as possible into your bath water. For added benefit you can add half - 1 cup of baking soda, 3-5 drops of lavender essential oil. Soak for 30 min.

### **Love your liver**

A mainstay of herbal detoxification is supporting the liver. The liver's main job is to filter blood coming from the digestive tract. Your liver must work overtime to filter out the toxins from chemical exposure.

**Life habit choices:** Getting regular, adequate sleep is key. Turn screens off at least an hour before bed. Your liver continues to work while you sleep, especially around 2am.

**Dietary considerations:** Hydrate. Drink an 8oz glass of water before bed. Avoiding alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, processed sugary, fried or high fat foods will make its job easier. Back off dairy which can slow down your digestion causing harmful inflammation.

**Inflammation:** When you're inflamed your body can't break down certain invaders like some viruses or a food you're sensitive to, thus making your immune system work harder to heal an infection or injury.

**Keep things moving with a high fibre diet:** Eating seasonal fruits and veggies will help clean out your colon. Eat the colour of the rainbow! Consider adding Miso soup, seaweeds and shiitake mushrooms to help your body heal. Psyllium seeds or husks are an inexpensive fibre addition to the diet. Always take psyllium with at least two cups of water. Discontinue if irritation or gas occurs.

### **Herbal liver and digestive support**

Bitter herbs taken before meals to stimulate gastric secretions to help your body process chemicals. Fresh dandelion greens, artichoke, digestive bitter blends.

**Milk Thistle seeds** (*Silybum marianum*): Prevents and treats liver damage from chemicals and viruses. Taken as capsules, extract or cold infusion. Standardised powdered extract at 85% silybum is most effective, in capsules, or 30-60 drops tincture, 3 x daily. Herbalist Kami McBride keeps seeds in her pepper grinder which makes it fun and easy for all to add a teaspoon to your

meals.

**Burdock root** (*Arctium lappa*): It encourages friendly bowel flora and gently increases lymph, kidney, and liver function. It is an anti mutagen with a long history of use in ‘cancer formulas’. Burdock helps to stabilise mast cells, which reduces allergic reactions. As decoction, 2 cups per day is most effective. As extract, 50-80 drops 3x a day, or 1/4 tsp powder eaten with meals. Eaten fresh, it’s known as gobo in sushi rolls or miso soup.

**Dandelion root** (*Taraxacum officinale*): acts on the microflora of the gut. Helps with chronic constipation due to poor fat metabolising, clay coloured stools and sluggish liver. 1-4 cups of tea a day, 1/4/ tsp with meals, or tincture extract, 30-59 drops up to 4x a day. You can add 1/4 part of the dried dandelion root to the burdock in the crockpot or on the stovetop. ‘Dandy Blend’ is a palatable freeze-dried dandelion root tea available on the market.

**Triphala** is a blend of three fruits used in Ayurvedic medicine and is “quite possibly the best formula for normalising gastrointestinal function available”. It improves liver function and improves it against environmental toxins and improves digestion. It’s anti-inflammatory, enhances circulation, expels mucus from the respiratory passages, fights infection, for constipation, general toxicity, and much more. Powder in hot water, can add honey or take as a capsule. (Easley/Horne).

## **Respiratory health**

**Mucous is your protective barrier!** Thankfully we can actively take steps to care for our mucous membranes. Avoid dryness of the mucosa, especially important after injury or viral respiratory conditions. If you run dry then hydrate and consume moist foods including nourishing veggie or bone broths.

**Herbal steams** gently penetrate the respiratory mucosa, ease dryness, help with congestion and coughing, are antimicrobial - good for your lungs especially if you may have been exposed to or showing symptoms of a respiratory viral infection. Boil water and add a mix of 1-4 aromatic kitchen herbs of your choice: 1 tbsp of each - rosemary, thyme, sage, clove, oregano, basil, bay leaf, eucalyptus, peppermint, conifer leaves or lavender. Place the pot somewhere you can sit down in front of it comfortably. Check that the water isn’t too hot for your face then make a steamy tent with a big towel over your head, inhale through your nose for 10 minutes. Do not re-use.

**Humidify the air:** If your house or workplace is excessively dry, consider running a humidifier or simply put a pot of water uncovered on the stove, wood heater, or radiator. Add the above-mentioned herbs.

**Eat garlic!** The sulphur smell on your breath is medicinal and healing to your lungs as an antibacterial and antiviral. Add it into your foods at the very end when cooking them. As soon as garlic touches heat it begins to lose some of its medicinal properties but raw garlic can be too irritating, so cook it only slightly.

**Demulcents** to soothe and coat your mucous membranes, especially important for dryness or dry coughs.

**Mullein leaf** (*Verbascum thapsus*): is excellent lung support, especially if you are asthmatic, have a dry cough, or have been exposed to contaminants. Tea is best. An extract is good too. As a tea make sure to strain the mullein leaves through a coffee filter. Mullein's tiny little hairs, which look like the cilia of our lungs 'coincidentally enough', can be highly irritating! As an extract, you can take 40-60 drops every four hours or so, immediately following exposure. After a day, decrease this to 30-50 drops 3x a day.

**Licorice root** (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*): Has an ancient history of use in China and the Middle East. Strengthens the endocrine system especially the adrenals; for sore throats, heals the stomach. Contraindicated with high blood pressure. Drink three cups daily, 10-20 drops of herbal extract. Don't overdo the licorice, a little goes a long way.

**Marshmallow** (*Althea officinalis*): This slightly slimy medicine is very soothing for dry coughs, irritated throat and mucus membranes in the bladder, stomach, and intestines as well as in the urinary tract. Marshmallow requires cold water to release its medicine. Simply place 2 tbsp of the powder or chopped root in a jar, fill with cold water, cap and soak 1-2 hours or overnight. For chopped root, strain it and be sure to squeeze all the slime out. For powdered root, shake and sip. Drink 1/2 - 4 x daily. You can add to tea or juice. Store in



*Mullein*

the refrigerator where it will keep 3-4 days.

### **Expectorants**

Too much mucus? Cut back on the dairy, sugar, processed foods and add expectorant herbs to help bring out mucus hung up in the lungs.

**Fire cider** is great here (see immune/recipes).

**Thyme tea:** For some people thyme works better for them than echinacea, especially if they always get wet/damp lung infections. It is warming and drying, 1/2 a cup 3x daily. It also goes great in fire cider.

**Elecampane root** (*Inula helenium*): is indicated for a wet cough that helps bring up old hard mucus and lung grunge that may be stuck in your lungs. It is antiseptic and indicated for a ticklish cough and pain in the chest. The herb is warming and drying so if you already have a dry cough, elecampane might not be the right herb for you. Or pair it with the above herbs for added moistening effect. It also stimulates digestive and liver function. Extract is 20-30 drops 3-4x per day. Two cups of tea per day.

**Yerba Santa Leaf** (*Eriodictyon californium*): This warming and drying plant clears phlegm from the chest and opens air passages. Especially helpful for asthma and profuse expectoration (Easley). Also for wet bronchitis or pneumonia. Tea 1/2 cup 3 x per day; extract 20-40 drops 3x daily (Winston).

**Grindelia** (*Grindelia squarrosa*): dried leaf or fresh unopened flower buds: This warming plant breaks up old, hardened mucus. It eases breathing in bronchitis and asthma, is antispasmodic, and can be combined with the herb plantain to pull thick mucus out of the lungs. Caution: not for long term use or kidney or heart disease. 5 drops every 15-30 minutes during coughing fits. 1-3 mls 2-4 x per day (Easley/Horne).

### **Antispasmodics**

Coughing can be your ally but you can use these herbs to ease coughing with irritation that keeps you from sitting in peace or resting:

**Wild Cherry Bark** (*Prunus serotina*): It has a long history of use in cough remedies. This remedy cools phlegm and soothes and dries out mucous membranes. Cold infusion (strong) 1/4 - 1/2 cup, 3-5x per day. Tincture, fresh bark 10-40 drops, 1-4x per day (Easley/Horne).

**Onion Cough Syrup:** decongestant to lungs, breaks up and moves mucous. May be important for shortness of breath with a stuck phlegm.

(Rose/Easley).

**Onion, Garlic, Mustard:** Don't underestimate the power of onion, mustard and garlic external chest packs to bring circulation to your chest and open your lungs up!

### **Boost your immunity**

For centuries humans have used herbal medicines for supporting our immune systems however herbs are not a magic cure-all. Make sure that you're consuming adequate amounts of veggies that are the colour of the rainbow (rich in antioxidants), getting adequate sleep, staying hydrated, exercising, nature-breathing, sunset watching. Exercise and movement in general supports the lymphatic system which is intricately a part of our immunity. Helping our body sweat is one of the best ways to assist the skin in eliminating wastes: movement, baths, saunas.

**Foods should be simple and warming:** broths, soups, and teas. Foods that are rich in sulphur-containing compounds are detoxifiers and immune-enhancing: Garlic and onions (alliums), and the brassica family of vegetables - broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and Brussel sprouts. Avoid foods that weaken the immune system and cause mucus: sugar, carbs, processed foods, dairy, and junk foods, fruit juices including orange.

**Kitchen spices:** Did you know that your kitchen spices can be used as immune-boosting teas? Boil water and steep a mix of whatever you have: fresh ginger (the powder is good too but note that it is very drying), cinnamon, star anise, rosemary, oregano, turmeric and thyme.

Important allies during cold and flu season and respiratory viral infections, these are warming, sweat-inducing, pungent herbs that will drive blood circulation toward the skin and mucous membranes thus supporting our immediate immune defences. These herbs are also thin fluids - meaning too much mucus. Yarrow and lemon balm are also great here. Be sure to use more than a culinary dose! Make a strong-tasting hot tea and drink while hot!

**Fire Cider** is inexpensive and easy to make. This blend is made up of kitchen herbs that are anti-inflammatory, antiviral and antimicrobial. It is known to be used for colds and flu, to stimulate sweating, to relieve bronchial congestion, and overall a boost for the immune system to help fight off bacteria and viruses.

**Echinacea** (*Echinacea purpurea/angustifolia*): extract and tea is a well-known

and widely used short-term immune booster. It can strengthen and clear lymph and helps the body fight viral infections.

**Elderberry flowers** (*Sambucus nigra*): are a longstanding remedy in tea for feverish cold or flu.

**Elderberry syrup:** is one of our best antivirals. Studies have proven it prevents the influenza virus from replicating. 1 tbs 4x day for adults. Can be taken long term in a single daily dose.

**Vitamin C:** to reduce oxidative damage after injury 1000 - 3000 mg daily.

**Vitamin D and Zinc:** are also very important to supporting a healthy immune system. The daily recommendation of Vit D3 was recently upped to 4000 IU/day. To assist recovery from injuries, you can increase Vit D3 to 10,000 IU/day for a couple of weeks.

## HERBAL REMEDIES FOR BUMPS, BRUISES, BURNS, TASER AND HANDCUFF INJURIES

### Minor bumps and bruises

**Arnica** (*Arnica Montana* or *A. Cordifolia*): to reduce swelling, bruising and pain from an injury. Use topically as a cream, liniment, or oil. Do not put on cuts or open skin. Great internally as homoeopathic tablets only.

**St John's Wort** (*Hypericum perforatum*): anti-inflammatory, supporting recovery from blunt trauma, bruises, sprains or experiencing numbness or pain. It stimulates nerve regeneration and repair and helps heal wounds. Use as a liniment or massage oil externally. Use with caution in the sunlight. Used internally this herb may cause photo-sensitivity. Fresh extract internally, 5-25 drops and then add 10 drops every 10 minutes until the pain subsides. Avoid when taking SSRI antidepressants.

**Comfrey** (*Symphytum officinalis*): has been used for generations to aid in the healing of injuries by stimulating cell growth. (Easley/Horne). Avoid use on wounds deeper than they are wide, and where cancer or tumours are present. Apply fresh or dried leaf as a poultice, compress or soak. Also as a salve or oil. (Easley/Horne)

**CBD**, and if possible with THC (cannabis): Helpful for a trauma and if one needs to rest comfortably after being injured. Forms: oil, salve, and internally via extracts or cannabis-infused honey or foods. Tinctures of CBD or THC in small doses or THCA (unheated) extracts can be excellent to have



in your toolbox.

Keep an unheated alcohol extract (liniment) in a spray bottle for a quickly absorbing topical application that is also antimicrobial and antiviral. A simple oil based extract made from whole flowers (preferably not distillate) is multi purpose as it can be taken orally or used topically. This is preferable if there are abrasions that would be irritated by alcohol.

You can also make a tea in water and use it as a soak or wash for bruises or sore muscles. A few drops of oil in a warm bath with Epsom salts is also really soothing, especially mixed with some other herb oils or essences.

**To soothe the eyes:** cooled chamomile tea bags or placed in a bandage.

### Handcuff injuries

Handcuffs may cause damage to the nerves in the wrists, causing numbness, tingling and weakness in the hands. The sooner you are treated, the better for your recovery. Handcuff injuries can be very sensitive so you have to be extremely gentle and patient, gently massaging oils into the affected and nearby regions over a long period of time. The numbness can be long term and become a serious problem if left untreated or underrated. Herbal medicines shine here!

Ice is debated as the most beneficial for immediate aftercare. Certain injuries do better with heat. Some do better with hot and cold contrast therapy. Rest your injuries as much as possible.



*Comfrey*

**Arnica** salve, liniment, or cream - best immediately after.

**St John's Wort** oil (see above)

**CBD** and if possible with THC (cannabis): See 'Bumps, bruises'. Mixes well with St John's Wort.

**Cow Parsnip** (*Heracleum maximum*): Clinical herbalists in the Lower 48 successfully use the root or seed tincture topically for stimulating the nerve bundles to regenerate.

## Burns

Canisters fired into crowds are at high velocity and can be very hot, which can cause second-degree/partial thickness burns from extended exposure. Burns could be caused by tasers as well.

**Lavender essential oil:** is versatile and great for burns, blisters, bug bits, rashes, wound care and is one of the only essential oils that you can use directly on your skin. It is antiseptic. A couple of drops goes a long way.

**Honey** (raw or organic): Soothes inflamed skin, relieves pain, brings moisture to the area and stimulates skin regeneration. Its antibacterial properties decrease the chance of infection.

**Aloe vera:** especially great for minor sunburn. Add lavender essential oil for an extra boost.

## Taser Injuries

This weapon delivers volts of electricity that overrides your central nervous system causing it to curl up, clenching all muscles. It takes control of a person's body away from them while simultaneously delivering a lot of pain. There is often a superficial skin injury with possible surface burns. Some tasers shoot a pair of metal barbs into the skin, attached to the base unit with small coiled wires. It may be useful to learn how to remove the barbs.

A National Institute of Justice study found that the user of taser-type weapons was implicated in the death of 200 individuals. Find out how many stuns were used in the incident and for how long. Increased risk of complications are found with a cumulative use over 15 seconds. Discover as much as you can about the individual's health history. Conditions that put a person more at risk include cardiac disease, pregnancy, and extreme mental states. People with these conditions may need monitoring and/or follow-up medical care.

Before making contact with the patient, be sure the taser device is no longer active. Wear gloves and snap the wires if still attached. They probably won't be if the person is in your care. The disconnected barbs themselves cannot deliver a shock.

Expose the two or more barbs attached to the skin and determine if any vital areas are affected. Special concern is needed if the barb entry is near an eye, on the face or neck, or in the breast, armpit or genital areas. Place your hand on the person's skin at least 4 inches away from the barb - you want to

avoid raking your hand with the barb as it comes out. Next, grasp the dart between your thumb and index finger and pull directly up from the skin surface. Carefully place the dart in a standard sharps container or other well marked hard sided container and dispose of, or consider keeping for evidence.

Treat the wounds. Wash with regular soap and water, use an herbal salve or lavender essential oil, and cover with a bandaid. Repeat a couple of times until healed. Monitor for infection.

### **Holistic treatment for taser**

**Electrolytes are key!** See the description above to see their importance here.

**Nettles:** Tea is nourishing with a high mineral content, and key for acetylcholine balance. Acetylcholine is a compound that occurs throughout the nervous system, a chemical messenger released by nerve cells to send signals to other cells, such as neurons, muscle cells and gland cells. (See more about the nourishment of nettles, listed above).

**Magnesium:** The average person is deficient in magnesium. It is extremely important for so many processes in our bodies. It can help address sluggish digestion, impaired sleep quality, restless leg syndrome, grinding your teeth, muscle spasms, and chronic muscle stiffness and tension. Dosage per directions on the bottle but be consistent.

**Nervines:** see nervous system

**Adaptogens:** see nervous system

**Consider injuries** from falls that might cause non-visible internal bruising.

**Epsom salt bath**

**Massage and acupuncture**

## **NOURISH YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM: ANXIETY, TRAUMA, DEPRESSION AND INSOMNIA**

The physical and emotional effects of intense emergency situations may stick around in our bodies long after actual events have ended. This can show up as disturbed sleep, nightmares, anxiety, agitation and depression.

**Sleep:** Did we mention adequate sleep yet? Your body's best way to heal.

**Breathwork** can have profoundly calming effects immediately. Anytime you want to hack your vagus nerve to reduce the fight or flight or freeze stress or improve decision making, take two minutes to do 10 rounds of breathing: 4 seconds inhaling, 8 seconds exhaling.

**Acupuncture** for addressing anxiety and post traumatic stress, to detox, respiratory support, help your eyes heal after chemical weapons, balance menstruation, bring your body back into balance and more.

**Plant remedies:** the following mix well together.

**Nettles** (*Urtica dioica*): is an ideal all-around herb with high iron and mineral content and supportive of many body functions. Anti-inflammatory, anti-allergenic properties. It increases oxygen transport in your blood, calms you down and supports your body in returning to its regular, strong self. 1-4 cups of tea daily. Extract 15-30 drops 3x daily.

**Skullcap** (*Scutellaria lateriflora*): Soothes nerves, for irritation, anger and chronic stress. Helps calm brain function and inability to pay attention; for oversensitivity to stimulation and may be twitchy even in sleep (Easley). It is helpful for insomnia. Fresh tincture 10-25 drops, 2-3 times per day. Hot tea 3-4 cups daily.

**Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*): “makes the heart merry” and is easily cultivated. It elevates the mood, soothes the digestive tract, relieves body tension, strengthens and tonifies the nervous system including memory, and can be helpful for panic attacks that are fear/terror based. 5-20 drops of tincture 2-5 x day or 2-3 cups daily.

**Chamomile** (*Matricaria chamomilla*): soothes the nerves and digestion. Great for children. 2-3 cups of tea a day. 25-30 drops 1 - 4 x daily.

**Whole milky oats** (*Avena sativa/Avena fatua*): is an excellent nerve food for a depleted mental and physical exhaustion with irritability and lack of focus (Easley/Horne). Use cautiously with gluten sensitivity or allergy. Fresh extract 10-30 drops 3x daily; 1-4 cups of tea daily.

**Passionflower** (*Passiflora incarnata*): If you can't fall asleep because your mind keeps running, passionflower has your back! Also for treating anxiety, headache and muscular/nerve pain. Fresh extract 30-40 drops before bed or 3 x daily; 2 cups per day.

**Lavender essential oil** for panic attacks, depression. Keep a bottle handy to smell throughout the day. 3 drops in your diffuser or bath. Diffusers can be

found at big box stores.

### **Adaptogens**

Adaptogens increase our body's resistance to physical, biological, emotional and environmental stressors. They provide a defence response to acute or chronic stress, restore the balance of the endocrine system, and modulate the immune and nervous systems, helping us to become more resilient (Winston). The repeated rush of adrenalin from confronting police brutality and the resulting emotions of grief, anger, and fear can severely tax our adrenal glands resulting in deep fatigue and exhaustion.

**Holy Basil/Tulsi** (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*): An important Ayurvedic herb used in India for the mind and nervous system. It lifts the spirits while increasing clarity of thought and dispelling depression. Addresses chronic stress, protects the heart, lowers blood pressure and cholesterol, enhances digestion. It is also for protection. Infusion, 3 x daily. Extract 30-50 drops 3 x daily. Pairs nicely with rose petals.

**Ashwagandha** (*Withania somniferum*): An important Ayurvedic herb and one of the best tonic remedies of India for anxiety, depression, exhaustion, and poor muscle tone. It “gives the virility of a horse” and can help you have deeper, more restful sleep. 1 tsp powder decocted in your milk of choice and a little honey before bed. 40-80 drops 3x daily. Avoid this plant if you are sensitive to plants in the nightshade family, do not use the powder if you have excess iron, or if you have hyperthyroid disease. Caution with barbiturates and thyroid hormones (Winston).

**Reishi Mushroom** (*Ganoderma lucidum*): This mushroom has a long history of use in Chinese medicine demonstrating immune-enhancing effects, for anxiety, insomnia, bad dreams, moodiness and as a general health tonic. Decoction, 3 cups of tea daily.

**Licorice root:** See demulcents.

### **Flower essences**

These remedies work on an energetic level and can be profoundly healing. Flower essences are super safe, super sustainable, work well in stressful situations and long after a traumatic event. They are a great option if you are sensitive to herbs or are taking multiple medications. You can make your own or purchase at your local herb store or online: Alaskan Flower Essences, Desert

Alchemy, Bach, and Flower Essence Society.

**Five flower formula or Rescue remedy:** for overall recovery from shock and trauma, especially for immediate use.

**Red clover:** for self-aware behaviour, calm and steady presence, especially in emergency situations (good for mass hysteria/easily influenced by panic).

**Coral bean and Gold:** specifically indicated post traumatic stress.

**Gold Alaska Essence:** for personal power; post traumatic stress, holding back.

**Elm:** ‘psychological smelling salts’, temporary conditions. Gives strength to the strong in moments of weakness.

**Oak:** Chronic conditions. Overachievers, overworked, extreme inner pressure.

**Olive:** no reserves left, deep inner tiredness, physical and mental fatigue.

**Aspen:** best remedy for developing courage.

**Pink Yarrow:** earth upheaval, climate crisis/apocalypse fears. Supports to the open, protected heart.

**Nasturtium:** ‘professor syndrome’, over-intellectualising, moves intellect out of head and into heart.

**Hornbeam:** Clears the head, stiffens the spine. Weariness and exhaustion in the mind.

The guide then includes some medicine making advice which I have left out as you can read the ‘*Medicine Making Basics*’ in the resources section. You can find the other recipes, resources and references, as well as the whole guide at: <https://www.mashhclinic.com/>

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*Contribution:*  
**MUGWORT HYDROSOL AS CHEMICAL WEAPON AFTERCARE**

*Hex*

I currently live in the traditional and stolen territories of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Chinook, Cowlitz, Tualatin, Tenino, Kalapuya, Molalla, and Wasco people, colonially known as Portland, Oregon. Recently we have had a lot of attention directed towards us because of our rapid and enduring mobilisation around the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020. George Floyd's murder by police was the fiery match thrown onto the powder keg of a gravely mishandled pandemic response by the government, a preventable mass eviction crisis, chronic lack of affordable healthcare, and systemic racist policies. The state repression that followed this uprising involved various techniques of police brutality, in particular the use of massive amounts of tear gas on protesters.

While there are multiple types of tear gas, all of them activate pain receptors in the body and target mucous membranes. Exposure to tear gas can burn mucous membranes and cause lacrimation, disorientation, panic, coughing, and other respiratory difficulties. Such damage to the mucous membranes makes them more susceptible to pathogens.

Between wearing a mask all the time and getting frequently exposed to tear gas, my skin started to look similar to my prepubescent days. I was following the chemical weapon decontamination protocol of taking a cold shower after each exposure, and was taking liver support supplements to help my body



*Mugwort*

process the toxins. But none of this was helping with the acne! Finally, the mugwort growing outside of my house nudged me to make a hydrosol with it. I kept the finished hydrosol in the fridge, applied a cold splash of it onto my face in the morning and night, and after a few days my skin started to return to its normal. And the acne? Obliterated.

Hydrosols are generally considered to be a gentle astringent and tonic, suitable for daily use on most skin types. Hydrosols are nourishing to sensitive or inflamed skin and can counteract the drying effects of the atmosphere or, in this case, exposure to tear gas. Mugwort cools irritated skin and is also antibacterial and antifungal. The cooling and anti-bacterial qualities of mugwort complement the gentle astringency and toning effect of the hydrosol preparation. Because of how healing this remedy was, mugwort hydrosol has become yet another important herbal ally in my resiliency tool-kit.

### **Mugwort Hydrosol Recipe**

After asking and receiving permission from mugwort to harvest it, gather roughly half a gallon total of fresh leaves and flowers. The flowers have a higher concentration of essential oils in them than the other aerial parts of the plant but use what you have on hand.

Strip the leaves off the stalks and arrange at the bottom of a large stock pot. Set a small heat-treated bowl upside down among the circle of leaves and flowers. On top of this bowl, place another bowl that fits neatly inside the stock pot, flush with the walls of the pot. (You can also use a glass measuring cup, understanding that you might lose some of the final hydrosol). Don't wait to get expensive equipment; use what you have on hand. Be a punk, try it, and it's ok if it's not perfect.

Next, fill the pot with enough water for the mugwort to be floating but for the bowl on the bottom to not float away. Place a lid that fits well upside down over the stock pot. It is important that the lid fits and is upside down because the next step is to put ice on top of the lid. Place this contraption over a stove on medium heat. As the water turns into steam it will rise with the mugwort essence, hit the cold pot lid, condense, and drip back into the bowl or glass measuring cup in the bottom of the pot. As the ice melts make sure to keep adding more so the lid stays cool. This gets a little wet and messy and is part of the fun.

As this method is not using a fancy store-bought still there will likely be





some steam that escapes. Even though this does mean less total hydrosol, it will make whatever room you are in smell amazing and help connect you to the plant. The steam is also good for you and inhaling it will speed the healing of lung infections and decrease respiratory inflammation - which in the time of Covid-19 feels important to mention.

This process extracts the cellular water from the plant and then distills it into a more concentrated form. This principle can be applied to other projects such as distilling alcohol. The process of distilling hydrosols and essential oils is a technology and an art that has it's roots in ancient Egyptian culture and would not be available to us today if not for the ingenuity and intellect of ancient Egyptians.

May we rise together.

Hex, Summer 2020

*Hex is a queer femme from a mixed Croatian, Ukrainian, German, and English background. She is a street medic and is currently attending herbalism school in Portland, Oregon. When not in the streets she likes to bake brownies and watch trashy reality TV.*

## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* HERBAL SOLIDARITY FOR FRONTLINE RESISTANCE, HS2

HS2, ‘High Speed Two’, is the British state’s project to build a 343-mile, cross-country, high-speed railway line across the country. There has been an ongoing campaign against the project since 2009 with many groups taking action including national campaigns such as Stop HS2, and autonomous local groups of residents and others taking direct action against the railway. People have been fighting the development due to its damage and destruction to ancient woodlands, wildlife habitat loss, disruption to communities, homes being seized by compulsory purchase orders, the relentless noise and dust pollution and the sheer cost of public funds - an expected eye watering £100 billion<sup>1</sup>.

Many are fighting the project due to the carbon emissions it will create. Resistance has been effective with a large part of the line between Birmingham and Manchester being scrapped saving thirty-two ancient woodlands. Work continues between London to Birmingham.

Protest camps emerged at various construction sites across the HS2 route. One of these was at Jones Hill Wood, also known as ‘Roald Dahl Woods’, a piece of ancient woodland near Wendover in Buckinghamshire. People set up in the trees in March 2020 and lived in the woods for over six months, resisting attempts to destroy the woodland. In October 2020, people experienced a challenging eviction.

In October 2020, I sent a herbal care package to twenty-five people who had been subjected to the eviction. They shared their experiences:

*“The Jones Hill eviction has been an exhausting, horrible, incredible experience. As a community we stood together, we held out in the trees for a week and forced the NET (National Eviction Team) to get the police in to remove us on bullshit charges because they could not deal with us themselves. We beat the bailiffs here and that always has to be seen as a victory. But we have also been removed from our homes, watched the spaces we have built over the last six months ripped apart, and experienced violence at the hands of the state, or watched it enacted on our friends. Bailiffs twisting people up and coppers hitting folk isn’t new or special, and it’s a small taste of the state’s violence in comparison to the experiences of criminalised people in*

the UK and around the world, but it has taken a massive toll on many of us.

*The eviction has meant a huge amount of stress and pressure on people, on the ground and in the trees. The lack of sleep and decent food, and general stress of constantly being ready to respond to events has left a lot of us pretty fried. Solidarity Apothecary has provided everyone involved in the eviction (not just those in the trees, we recognise the immense stress that those doing less 'glamorous' or visible work on the ground were also under) with herbal remedies to boost the immune system, fight infection, and cope with residual stress as we recover together from this experience. Nicole has also sent us all a copy of her book, *Overcoming Burnout* – this we believe will be extremely helpful in setting the tone of our conversations as a community about how we are going to move forwards from this eviction and continue to fight against HS2 as a strong, healthy community that look after each other."*

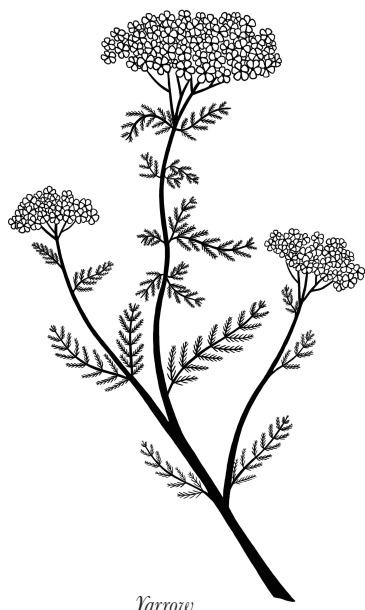
– Love from the StopHS2/TINAAR crew

In 2020 I sent the crew a herbal pack. As it was the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, many of the packs I sent out included:

- **Elderberry syrup** - this is a glycerite blend of elderberries, cinnamon and fennel seeds, combined with a Marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*) gloop to make the blend very mucilaginous (slimy!) and soothing for sore throats

and dry coughs. See the full recipe in the section about the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais.

- **Fire Cider Vinegar** - for people living in damp and cold conditions, herbs ideally need to be warming. Fire cider vinegar is a perfect blend of warming herbs and spices to help people get through the winter. See the recipe contributed by Herbalista.
- **Chest rubs** - herbs do not only need to be taken internally, they are also very powerful topically. Chest rubs have been shown to be very effective in treatment for respiratory infections alongside internal medicine. They are also fantastic as preventatives and



Yarrow

can even offer nervous system support depending on the essential oils and herbs chosen. See the full recipe in the section about the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais.

- **Fever tea** - this is a tea blend specifically designed for people struggling with a high temperature caused by Covid-19 or other infections. It contains the traditional blend of elderflowers, peppermint and yarrow. The combination supports people with a fever due to its diaphoretic action (which supports sweating), and antimicrobial qualities.
- **Nervous System Blends** - see the section on '*Brave Heart Blend*'. Depending on the season or context, I would try to complement this existing blend of hawthorn, rose and lemon balm, with something warming (such as ginger, turmeric, thyme etc) for people living in cold conditions such as a protest camp.

While states and corporations continue to plunder the planet, there will always be a need for resistance, whether this is the many grassroots campaigns using all means to pressure decision makers, or people living in the trees themselves to prevent their felling. Herbal support can help sustain people doing this important, emotionally and physically exhausting work on the frontlines.

## Resources

- <https://stophs2.org/>
- <https://www.hs2rebellion.earth/>

## References

1. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-much-hs2-cost-so-far-ckdnf2mpv>

## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* **BADGER CULL AND HUNT SAB SOLIDARITY**

State violence is not just organised against humans. Indeed, non-humans including animals and the land, are also victims of vast operations of organised state violence. It may be transport building programs that decimate habitats, such as the HS2 railway detailed in the previous section, or the state protecting corporate interests such as animal testing, as I described in my story of repression.

Another major organised operation of state violence against animals is the badger cull, a massacre of these beautiful wild creatures across different areas of England. The most recent wave of badger culling began ten years ago in a handful of ‘cull zones’ that have now expanded. More than 210,000 badgers have been killed in the decade since 2013<sup>1</sup>.

This has been met by organised resistance, both active lobbying and public campaigns, as well as direct action by saboteurs (sabs for short). We have a long tradition of sabbing in England such as local groups going out to stop fox hunting by calling hounds away from the scents of foxes and generally disrupting hunts. Many hunt sab groups are also active in resisting the badger cull which involves going out at night into the cull zones with a diversity of tactics. Some people volunteer as ‘badger patrol’ who walk around the cull zones and report information on where shooters have been spotted. Other autonomous groups may take more direct action such as trashing badger cages, or actively disrupting shooters. Some people may sit and guard a particular set through the night.

I was involved in the early years of the cull until it contributed to intense physical burnout that led to the *Overcoming Burnout* book. Sadly I no longer sab the cull, I decided to focus on prisoner support and not stretch myself so thin across so many struggles. I remember the cull vividly - the toll it takes on your body staying up so late at night (often after working all day), the constant adrenaline and stress hormones, the group dynamics, the terrible habits of poor nutrition just for sheer energy demands (scoffing crisps and chocolate, and endless coffee).

For people sabbing the cull, it is a test of physical and emotional endurance. For those taking action in the night to defend badger setts, they face sleep deprivation, colds and flu, sore muscles, and more. Then Covid-19 was added

to the mix, which as we all know, brings its own risks of severe health disruption including long covid. There is also the emotional weight of not always being able to prevent the death of these amazing animals.

I wanted to support the badger cull and hunt sabs with their amazing and important work. Packages were sent to groups across the country (sadly I lost count of how many!) but all were met with appreciation and I think they achieved their goal of supporting people to buffer the worst of the cull's health impacts. Sadly, the project only ran for two years as I was swept up in Ukraine Herbal Solidarity and the ever-demanding refugee clinic in Calais, however, it is something I would love to restart.

This is the text shared with the different groups and the details of medicines that were contained in the care packages:

### **Solidarity Apothecary for the Anti Badger Cull Sabs**

Please find some plant medicines enclosed to help support your health during the badger cull. Everything has been made by me with plants grown at a vegan organic smallholding in Somerset (with no captive animals or manures used). All the plants are relatively safe but everyone reacts differently to plants so please listen to your own body in terms of dosage or what works for you.

If you have any questions or run out of anything please email me at [info@solidarityapothecary.org](mailto:info@solidarityapothecary.org)

**Elderberry Tincture:** Elderberry has incredible antiviral and antibacterial properties. This tincture is for anyone who might start coming down with a cold or virus during the cull. It can also be taken as a preventative if anyone is on the edge due to stress/late nights.

How to take: As a preventative, take twice a day – 25 drops in some water. If someone is getting ill in an acute way, take 25 drops every few hours in water to help nip a cold in the bud.

**Rosehip Syrup:** Rosehips are a fantastic source of vitamin C, A, D and E. They were harvested extensively during the Second World War as an alternative to imported oranges (they have 20 x the vitamin C content by weight of oranges).

How to take: Take a spoonful every day.

**Fire Cider Vinegar:** This vinegar is made by infusing onion, garlic, lemon,

horseradish, chilli, cayenne pepper, black peppercorns, turmeric, rosemary and ginger. It is incredibly warming and will help ward off colds and infections due to its strong anti-microbial properties.

How to take: Take 1-2 teaspoons in water (or juice) at the first sign of a cold. You can also take a teaspoon as a preventative through the cull.

**Rose Petal Glycerite:** Rose petals are a fantastic resource for the nervous system and a very cooling remedy for hot, inflamed conditions. I have included it to help you calm/wind down after being out in the zone. It brings a feeling of comfort and relief. It is also great after moments of acute stress (like an interaction with the cops or shooters for example). Because it is quite cooling, it is worth taking it once you are back inside and warmed up, or when you are feeling really hot and stressed.

How to take: Simply take a sip when you need it.

**Lemon Balm Glycerite:** Lemon balm is a wonderful antiviral plant that also supports with anxiety. It can help calm a nervous digestive system. It is worth taking both as a preventative (like one teaspoonful every day) during the cull or as and when needed. For example, if your digestion is a bit off due to stress/interrupted sleep or if you are feeling particularly anxious or stressed.

How to take: Simply take a sip when you need it.

**Lavender Oil:** Lavender is such an amazing ally for stress! This oil is to help folks calm down/wind down/sleep after being out in the zone. It is simply organic lavender and organic olive oil. It is best to not use it when driving but if you are particularly stressed in the zone you could spray a little on yourself. It can make you sleepy though so not the best if you are trying to stay awake!

How to take: You can spray it anywhere on yourself. It is great to put a little bit on your temple and the back of your neck to help with sleep. You can also rub it on sore shoulders etc and add it to the bath.

**Immunity Tea Blend:** I have included dried elderflower and peppermint. Unfortunately, I have used all my dried yarrow (so if you find any - it's great to include). This tea blend is fantastic for those early stages of a cold to help nip it in the bud. Elder is very antiviral and will have a diaphoretic action (so you may sweat a little). Peppermint is a powerful antibacterial and will help with any

gastrointestinal issues. Together, they are great for colds and flu.

**How to take:** Add the dried herbs to a tea pot or some kind of cafetiere and add hot water. Leave to infuse but ideally drink it hot. It may be worth adding ginger too if you are feeling particularly cold.

**Heavy Heart Tea Blend:** For folks sabbing the cull, there

is a lot of stress, frustration, rage, as well as heartbreak when we know that animals have been shot. This tea blend is designed to help soothe our hearts during moments of struggle. It contains hawthorn flowers, lemon balm, rose petals, chamomile, lavender and skullcap. Please note it can be quite cooling in energy, so best drunk hot or at the end of the night when you are warmed up inside. All of these plants have a supportive action on the nervous system.

**How to take:** Add the dried herbs to a tea pot or some kind of cafetiere and add hot water.

**Elder Bark Salve:** Elder bark, when prepared properly, is strongly anti-viral and when used topically on the skin it can be fantastic for joint pain and arthritic complaints. This salve is made with organic soy wax, elder bark and some lavender essential oil. You can rub it on sore muscles or your feet, especially if you are developing fungal infections from too much time in the field. It is also great for tattoo healing or other general muscle pain.

**How to take:** Apply direct to the skin.

## References

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-66091279>





## *Contribution: Remedies & Recipes*

### FIRE CIDER VINEGAR

*Herbalista*

Herbalista distribute fire fider in and around Atlanta, supporting our friends on the street. This particular recipe was formulated to promote wellness during the cold and damp winter months. It is filled with classic antimicrobial and immune boosting herbs.

#### **About Fire Cider:**

*“Fire Cider is a popular traditional herbal remedy freely shared, made, produced and sold by hundreds of herbalists across the world. The remedy has taken on many different amendments over time, somewhat like chicken soup. Many people have their favorite version, but the base consists of fresh garlic, onions, ginger, horseradish and chile peppers that sit in vinegar for the desired amount of time, are strained, and then a bit of something sweet is usually added at the end. The remedy is used to help warm up the body, and generally acts as a stimulant and antimicrobial used during cold and flu season.”*

– Rosemary Gladstar, Herbalist

Learn more about the story of Fire Cider and its role in the fight to protect herbal medicine, keeping it in the hands of the people at [www.freefirecider.com](http://www.freefirecider.com)

**Uses for Fire Cider:** This is kitchen medicine at its finest! Helps to ward off colds and flus; warms you up in cold weather; great as a gargle for a sore throat; boosts the immune system; great tasting addition to food (put it on your collard greens, salads and stir fries).

**Energetics:** Hot, spicy, dry, moving, stimulating

**Main actions:** Antimicrobial, antibacterial, antifungal, probiotic, immune stimulant, immune tonic, digestive tonic

#### **Basic ingredients for Elderberry Fire Cider**

- ¼ cup fresh ginger (grated)
- ½ head fresh garlic (chopped)

- 1/2 onion (chopped)
- 1 tbsp dry turmeric
- 1/8 cup fresh horseradish (grated)
- 1/4 tsp dry cayenne pepper
- 1/3 cup dry elderberries
- pinch of black pepper
- 1 pint Apple Cider Vinegar
- Honey to taste (typically 1:8)

**Variations on the theme:** Here are some other ingredients to play around with to create your own version: rosemary, thyme, oregano, rosehips, cinnamon, astragalus, orange peel, grapefruit peel, etc...

### **Fire cider making instructions**

- Wipe down your medicine making area and wash your hands!
- Place all the ingredients (except the honey) in a 32 oz. (quart) mason jar.
- Then pour in the pint of Apple Cider Vinegar, making sure all the ingredients are covered.
- Cap the jar (use wax paper under metal caps to prevent rusting) and steep for around one month, shaking every now and then.
- Strain through cloth or fine sieve and compost the mark.
- Add 1 fl. oz of honey to every 8 fl. oz. of fire cider and mix well.
- Label your remedy with all the ingredients. Indicate the date it was made.
- Store your large batch in the fridge, pouring off a smaller bottle for everyday use. Fire cider lasts for up to 1 year in the fridge or around 6 months on the shelf.

**Dosage:** Take a tablespoon or small shot each day to stay healthy during the damp and cold fall and winter. Take doses more often when you are feeling under the weather. You can take Fire Cider straight or dilute it with water to taste. Try blending it together with elderberry syrup, which was served as the ‘house special’ in the Standing Rock medic tent.

**Contraindications:** None in particular. But as we always say - different strokes for different folks. Do not take it if you are allergic to any of the ingredients.

[www.herbalista.org](http://www.herbalista.org)

## *Contribution: Herbal Solidarity in Practice*

### SOLIDARITEA

#### *Fertile Souls*

Fertile souls began as an experimental 'queer survival school' in 2019, running a series of workshops for and by the QTIBIPOC community primarily from self defence to sound healing, self massage to herb walks.

Once the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and our lockdowns were overwhelmed with Zoom workshops, we didn't feel we had to add to this already busy space of online classes. We took inspiration and guidance from our friends in Turtle Island, Yves and the GoodwitchNYC, who set up a country wide mutual aid herbal medicine drive for Black folks in the wake of the Black Lives Matter 2020 uprising in response to the tragic murder of George Floyd.



Herbal medicine can be a luxury, especially in a time when going outside and foraging for some people could be dangerous with the virus, or personal safety. Yves and The GoodwitchNYC's medicine drive showed that herbalists across such a large landmass can come together to pool resources and offer plant medicine to the people who need it.

Our iteration in the UK was a smaller scale, but still with a big impact, sending out hundreds of care packages including locally harvested tea blends, and medicines donated from herbalists across the UK. We continued this medicine share even after the lockdowns were lifted, including small hand written zines too.



*bones tan jones (b.93 Liverpool) is a queer heretic whose work traverses materials, disciplines and time lines. raised in a church choir in the northwest of the UK, on the borderlands of mythical Wales and enchanted England, tan jones's work has ne'er strayed far from the ecclesiastic rituals of worship, only in tan jones's world, the church has been burnt, the yew trees thrive in the ashes, and god is trans. bones tan jones presents their living praxis 'optimystic dystopia' as a spiritual practice. an eternal storyteller, alternative realities are explored through alter egos, retellings of ancient Chinese and Celtic mythologies through creating; symphonies/operas/psalms/triptychs/sigils/stele/installations/interventions/inter-active workshops. [www.bonestanjones.world](http://www.bonestanjones.world)*

## *Contribution:* HOW TO SUPPORT AN HERBAL CALL-TO-ACTION

*Alexis J. Cunningsfolk*

I've enjoyed sending (and bringing) herbal remedies to protests and community apothecaries. Answering an herbal call-to-action is a simple way to support community and grow the revolution towards a more kind and more just society. Many of my herbal peers do the same, but this summer there was some of the largest outpouring of herbal support that I have seen in recent years. There were call-to-actions spurred on by the Orlando Grief Care Project in response to the Pulse massacre, multiple for local Black Lives Matter groups, and later by the needs of the ongoing Standing Rock Camp.

First, let's take a moment to appreciate the time, energy, and sheer will of organizing that the Orlando Grief Care Project continues to maintain.

### **Read the call to action carefully**

Communities know what they need and if they have put together a specific list of requests as well as instructions for proper packaging, mailing, etc. then please make their jobs that much easier by following their guidelines. The healers and medics at Standing Rock Camp, for example, requested alcohol-free remedies to support the rules of the camp. The Orlando Grief Care Project requested Bach Rescue Remedy and Rose-based remedies. Our work as herbal support is to reduce the amount of work that the organizing team is having to do. Pay attention to the details!

### **Choose accessible and appropriate remedies**

If you have read the call-to-action, then hopefully you will know what sort of situation your donations will be headed to. Is it a mobile street medic operation? A long-standing clinic? Is the purpose to have clients come and see herbalists or for herbalists to go out and distribute remedies to the community? When I have donated to up-and-coming or already established location-based apothecaries I'll send larger 4 to 8 ounce jars of liquid extracts or bulk bags of herbs. If, in the case of the Orlando Grief Project, I know that the remedies are being put

in care packages, I made sure to prepare and send easily distributed remedies in individual-use packaging.

Unless requested, I don't send herbs that require greater attention and expertise regarding dosage such as Lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*) or Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*). I stick to herbs that are generally considered safe such as Milky Oat (*Avena sativa*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Rose (*Rosa damascena*) to name just a few.

**Hot Tip!** Whenever making good first-aid and crisis care type remedies for yourself, your business or community, make a few extra to keep on hand to mail out quickly when a call-to-action arises.

### **Limit packaging waste and keep it organised**

Regarding packaging waste, be mindful of where you are sending your box. If you're sending it to an encampment with limited trash management capabilities, be as streamlined and minimal in your packaging as possible. Write letters of support on the inner flaps and walls of the box, for example, so as not to include excess paper waste.

If I am sending multiple packages at once I will label the outside of the boxes 'Box 1 of 3' and so on, so that the organizing team has a quick visual clue that they should be expecting more than one package from me. It is also nice for when boxes are being quickly organized and stored.

I know what it is like to receive a well-packed and organized package for an event versus a chaotic cacophony of stuff. Remember that we are wanting what we send to feel supportive, inspiring, and help the organizing team feel good as well as serve those who need help.

### **Label clearly**

Poorly labeled remedies are such a waste and add extra work to the organizing team. Employing clear labeling practices is an easy way to prevent a lot of confusion. Here is what a clear and useful label should contain:

- Name of remedy
- Common and latin binomial name of every herb contained
- Any additional contents such as type of alcohol, water, glycerin, etc.
- Date made and best used by date
- Brief instructions on use - sometimes this does not fit on a label, so I will include a handout (or handouts if herbal care packages are being made) on

recommended use.

- Your name and contact information (such as a website)

**Hot Tip!** Have a base label ready to go either printed out for you to fill in by hand with all of the above information or one that can easily be filled out on your computer and printed.

## **Promote!**

Whether or not you send remedies, promoting the call-to-action is vital in making sure that the herbal community knows that help is needed and for those who need help to know that they have resources they can access. You don't have to be an herbalist to promote and it is of immense help to those of us who have less time to do it because we are actively making remedies to send.

One great way of promoting and making remedies to send is to have a remedy-making party. Invite over friends and family, educate them about the call-to-action and then teach them how to make a simple remedy that everyone can then recreate then and there in bulk. It is a fun community-building way to educate and disseminate resources!

*Alexis J. Cunningsfolk (she/they) is an intersectional herbalist and witch who helps folks to radically re-enchant their lives. Her work is informed by her queerness, mixed ancestry, and the fact that they're a young hag just waiting for time to catch up. They host courses for starry-hearted healers and magickal practitioners grounded in inclusivity and justice along with providing a growing library of free online resources. Learn more at [wortsandcunning.com](http://wortsandcunning.com).*

# PART 4:

# PRISON



## INTRODUCTION TO PRISON

As I said in the introduction of the book, imprisonment is a cornerstone of state violence. It's used across the board from being arrested and held in a cell, to the walls and fences of a detention centre, to youth prisons, to vast prison complexes complete with factories to exploit prisoner labour. Weaponising the fear of prison and the threat of imprisonment is one of the state's main strategies of control. The state is able to maintain an oppressive society through a constant climate of fear of imprisonment. For many people this is almost a subconscious fear, for others it may be a constant state of awareness depending on the nature of state repression they are experiencing.

I want to acknowledge that prisons are different everywhere, with varying conditions and repressive strategies. My experiences in a British prison are going to be different to the person sleeping on a floor with two hundred others in a cell in Thailand, or someone freezing to death in a cell in Belarus. Despite the many differences, imprisonment across the globe shares the same intention of captivity and coercive control. I talk about the trauma of captivity in the section on 'healing from incarceration'. I also explore my experiences of practising herbalism in prison. Finally, I want to share some resources for those on the outside, the millions of loved ones affected by incarceration who experience state violence themselves as they accompany people through their sentences.

This section introduces the prison system and the prison industrial complex. It synthesises various articles I have written over the years about prison and abolition.

### **What is the Prison Industrial Complex?**

Right now over 90,000 people across the UK are locked inside cages that are socially and intellectually justified, rationalised and even celebrated. Many more people are in detention centres, young offenders' institutions and psychiatric units, as well as children's prisons that lock up 12-17 year olds<sup>1</sup>. There are more than 11.5 million people incarcerated worldwide, including a massive 2.2 million in the United States<sup>2</sup>. It is not just the grey walls and fences of prisons; it is the courts, the police, probation services, and the companies profiting from

transporting, warehousing and exploiting human beings.

This vast machine is known as the prison industrial complex (PIC). The long-term abolitionist organisation Critical Resistance defines the PIC as *“the term we use to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.”*<sup>3</sup>

The PIC leads to the ever-increasing criminalisation of communities that sustains and grows the population of the prison system. In turn, private industry is increasingly profiting from incarceration. The UK opened the first privately-operated prison in Europe in 1992. The New Labour government welcomed correctional corporations with open arms. This included G4S, itself historically birthed from the Wackenhut Corrections Corporation, once the second largest for-profit prison operator in the US. Under the government’s private finance initiative, fifteen private prisons have been opened in the UK since 1992<sup>4</sup>.

Private companies have been cashing in on incarcerated workers: powerless, non-unionised and desperate for wages for phone credit and other items. Working is often a welcomed alternative to the 22-hour bang up that most prisons operate. Prisoners that work in prisons have no rights to organise - no minimum wage or health and safety legislation apply. In the UK, if prisoners refuse to work, they are punished via the IEP (Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme) and can have visits, association time (time outside in a courtyard or out of cell) and other ‘privileges’ taken away from them. They are the ultimate captive workforce. Prison labour has long been a tool for conquest and domination, from using convict labour in colonisation, to putting prisoners to work to make goods for armies and war. The British state, for example, exploits them for key infrastructural projects, such as CrossRail, once they are released, as well as signing contracts with the British Armed Forces.

Beyond private prisons, for-profit companies are embedded in state-run prisons too who outsource most of the ‘facilities management’, healthcare and other areas of prison management. The prison system, like all systems of oppression, cannot be separated from capitalism and this is what the framework of the prison industrial complex aims to communicate.

Prisons harm us. They harm the people inside – many of whom resort to drugs, fighting, self-harm and suicide as responses to distress. They harm the families, partners and loved ones of those incarcerated. They harm our communities as they steal energy, creativity and contribution. Houses, jobs, relationships are lost. Prisons disappear people and they try to disappear social problems but instead they multiply them.

## **The functions of prisons**

Prisons everywhere are seen as fundamental to the smooth running of society. The prison industrial complex is rationalised and normalised as the way to keep society's law-abiding majority safe. We are told that safety of all kinds can be guaranteed by watching, controlling and caging whole groups of people. Who these groups are is not incidental. Working-class people, people of colour, queer communities, individuals experiencing mental health struggles, political organisers – all are targeted by the state. Prisons serve several functions in deterring resistance, maintaining class hierarchies and perpetuating poverty.

Rooted in the values of the 18th and 19th centuries, prisons emerged ideologically from the values of the church and capitalism. They developed from a logic that confinement, solitude and punishment can lead to moral reform. The idea was that being locked in a room and praying will somehow reform your 'devious nature'. While these justifications are gradually disappearing, they have been replaced with increasing rhetoric about 'rehabilitation'. This is a modern version of 'bad people' needing discipline and reform, without any focus on societal factors that contribute to crime or social harm, such as how patriarchy sustains rape culture.

## **Never-ending expansion**

Like all capitalist industries, the prison industrial complex needs its 'raw materials' to not only sustain profits, but increase them. This cannot be left to chance. The private prison industry, international building firms and security specialists all finance intensive lobbying efforts to keep the prison population growing. Under the Labour government alone, more than 3,600 new criminal offences were created between 1997–2010<sup>5</sup> – meaning that people who would previously have not been criminalised are now swept into the criminal justice net.

The prison population has doubled, not because rates of violent or imprisonable crimes have gone up (they haven't) but through changes to sentencing laws and the introduction of repressive sentences such as IPPs (Imprisonment for Public Protection). The IPP sentence was created in 2003 as a kind of indeterminate sentence whereby you have a minimum tariff to serve, after which you need to apply for freedom at parole hearings. Even when released you face a 99-year license meaning the threat of returning to prison hangs over you forever.

More than 8,711 people were effectively given life sentences for minor crimes and thousands were kept in prison years over their original tariff<sup>6</sup>. My best friend Taylor got four years for burglary and ended up doing 13 years in prison before killing himself - a direct response to the uncertainty of their release and an inability to remain imprisoned indefinitely.

Rising prison populations do not correlate with rising crime. The only thing rising is the policing, surveillance and criminalisation of certain sections of the population, which feed the conveyor belt of a highly profitable industry.

The phenomenal development of mass incarceration in the United States is intimately connected to the abolition of slavery and the criminalisation of people of colour as a form of ongoing racist repression. Similarly in the UK, over 25% of the prison population is from a 'Black and minority ethnic' background despite that categorisation representing only around 12% of the overall population<sup>7</sup>. Across Europe (and the world), undocumented migrants now also face prison cells (rebranded as 'detention centres').

### **Penal colonialism**

Prisons are also a major colonial tool – from the Gulags that enabled the colonisation of Siberia and the destruction and oppression of the many Indigenous communities living there, to the penal colonies of the British, French and other colonial powers. This isn't just in the past. In settler colonies such as



the United States, Canada, Australia and others – First Nations and Indigenous communities continue to be massively criminalised and make up large numbers of people in prison. This is how white supremacy and colonialism survive. Anti-colonial struggles are therefore interlinked to prison resistance, and so it is important to cultivate international solidarity amongst oppressed peoples across the world.

### **A place where all injustices converge**

Author Karlene Faith writes that “Prison is the place where all injustices converge”<sup>8</sup>. Prisons are the main weapon of the state to maintain a class-stratified society. It’s what stands between us and taking everything back from capitalists. Prisons keep people poor. They target racialised populations. They are an epicentre of violence against trans communities. The list is endless. Name any group of people experiencing oppression and you can guarantee they are a targeted part of the prisoner class. There are no ‘single issues’ when it comes to prison. All these forms of injustice are interconnected and as Faith says, they converge in prison.

Recognising prisons as weapons of state power makes them strategically important. Organisers from the Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee wrote:

*“...prison is vitally connected to all the other apparatuses of domination. They depend upon prison, so for us, attacking the legitimacy of prison is a means to destroy the state, or at least erode its power. We are anarchists, bitter enemies of the state, and we focus on prison because we are looking for the weakest spots in our enemies’ armour.”*<sup>9</sup>

### **Places of suffering and death**

I don’t like to play into the ‘crisis’ discourse that is used by politicians to push through reforms. Prisons have always been a crisis for the working class. They have always been places of suffering and death. They are inherently violent, by design, and no reforms will change this. They are working as they are intended to. In recent years, the UK has had one of the highest prisoner suicide rates recorded in the world. On average a prisoner self-harms every fifteen minutes and every four hours a prisoner tries to take their own life<sup>10</sup>. Thousands of children are in care, thousands of families are affected and thousands of people are subject to this institutionally structured violence.

This harm is not felt evenly. Some UK statistics from an annual publication

produced by the Prison Reform Trust<sup>11</sup>: over a quarter of people in prisons are people of colour, one in ten prisoners are Black and the number of Muslims in prison has more than doubled over the last 13 years. 12% of the prison population are also currently “foreign nationals” facing deportation. Over 80% of prisoners have mental health problems, two thirds have issues with addiction, alcoholism and problematic drug use and 36% are also estimated to have a physical or mental disability. More than a fifth have a learning disability that affects their ability to cope with the ‘criminal justice system’. Nearly half of the children in prison had been on the child protection register, and for adults in jail more than half had been emotionally, physically or sexually abused as children. 46% of women in prison also reported a history of domestic abuse.

I spent nearly two years in prison and witnessed these things intimately. No statistics could ever communicate the visceral reality of life behind bars, the blur of people self-harming on the wing, ligaturing and attempting to take their own lives. Bells and buzzers would go-off frequently with groups of officers running around responding to the latest incident, whether that was needing to resuscitate someone in their cell, or breaking up a bloody fight in the courtyard. If someone ‘spoke back’ to an officer or lost their temper and pushed them, a whole group of screws would come running and throw that person to the ground and ‘bend them up’. Their limbs would be pinned to the floor while other officers got in whatever kicks and punches they could get away with, often people couldn’t breath as knees held them down by their

necks. People would then be dragged to the segregation unit, a place of even more horror stories.

I worked as a volunteer Listener with the Samaritans, meaning I’d get called out to listen to people who felt acutely distressed or suicidal. This meant over the eighteen months I volunteered, I listened to hundreds of people



for thousands of hours. Similar stories surfaced regularly - unimaginable childhood abuse, rape and domestic violence. The worst depths of active addiction, dangerous street sex work, violent pimps and horror stories from crack houses. Stories of being caught stealing food, homelessness and absolute poverty. Tales of violent transphobic attacks, homophobic parents forcing their queer kids to live on the streets and more. I feel like people's stories were somehow etched into my skin and now live as scars that I can't forget. When I left prison, I made a promise to myself to never leave people behind - that I would keep fighting to end this system and never let prisoners be forgotten.

### **Prisons as hotbeds of struggle**

Prisons have always been a hotbed of struggle around the world – from the Kurdish freedom movement to the Black Panthers. Sakine Cansiz, a Kurdish revolutionary imprisoned in Turkey for many years wrote “Prisons are a battlefield”. They have been sites of organising, education, strikes and more for decades. We cannot forget that prisoners keep each other alive through collective care too – listening to each other, sharing resources, giving emotional support and on and on. These forms of resistance are often less visible than actions like hunger strikes, but they form a vital part of daily resistance to conditions that build power and solidarity. Separating prisoners into individual cells, as is now the common practice in new prisons, is a state strategy designed to destroy prisoner organising and these more collective forms of life.

Abolitionist Layne Mullet writes that:

*“Prisons are a symptom of the capitalist state’s desire to consolidate wealth and power. They provide a way for the state to continue functioning effectively and are one phase in a lineage of slavery, dispossession, and genocide. To abolish capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, we must work to end mass incarceration. To get at the roots of mass incarceration, we must take on the broader system that produces the logic of keeping millions of people in cages.*

*Prisons are a specific response to a moment of instability and crisis in the capitalist system. The destabilization and containment caused by the prison industrial complex allows the state to perpetuate unpopular economic reforms that would not be possible in the face of strong resistance movements.”<sup>12</sup>*

### **Prison abolition**

*“Prisoners no longer demand reform; they have suffered its reality.”*

- Os cangaceiros, *A crime called freedom.*

When doing workshops about prison abolition, the collectives I've organised with have always tried to unpack the ideas that prisons are natural, normal and necessary. Many people believe abolishing prisons is an unattainable dream, yet to us, this work is in the now. It is challenging concepts of punishment and social domination in everyday life.

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten write in the book *Undercommons*: “*What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society.*”<sup>13</sup>

This work of building a world without prisons is the focus of the book *Brick by Brick* by Cradle Community, a UK-based abolitionist collective. They write:

*“A world without prisons is nothing like the world we live in now. It is a world built on collective safety and care - for all of us. To build such a world, it is essential we abolish the prison system and every structure that serves to deprive us of our freedom, safety and dignity. The global prison abolition movement resists all forms of violence and oppression, inviting us to work to transform our relationships with each other and with the earth.”*<sup>14</sup> Their book explores everything from housing to responding to gender based violence.

## **Understanding harm**

The same questions and uncertainties arise consistently: don't some people deserve to be in prison? Abolitionists are not blind to the fact that acts committed by many people who end up in prison can and do harm other people. We would never downplay the trauma of being raped, the feeling of violation when robbed or the life-long memory of assault. The fact remains though, that it's often the same communities being criminalised that are most likely to experience these forms of harm. Prison offers no solution to violence or damage and are in fact only part of perpetuating more of the same.

We fight for abolition, some of us as survivors of abuse, because the state cannot meet our needs for safety. The focus of the state is always on the punishment of the perpetrator. The survivor's needs are not centred, and many find the process of reaching out to the police for support disempowering, ineffective and even dehumanising. Our power as survivors to articulate our needs and determine our own lives is taken away from us.

Our work as abolitionists and anarchists, is not just fighting prison expansion or doing prisoner support work, it is also the painstaking work of healing and



finding more nourishing ways of being in the world with each other. We know that many accountability processes and other models often fail, but this should act as a calling for the greater necessity to do this work. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to responding to harm and we need to invest all our creative energy in doing this work, because prisons will never solve these problems.

To fight for prison abolition is not just practically organising to stop prison expansion, it means challenging, on a daily basis, the very premise that the caging of human beings has a place in the world we want to create. Prison abolition may feel like an unreachable goal – but its perspective, that we can no longer normalise, rationalise or justify the use of imprisonment as alleged ways to solve social and economic problems – is an ongoing strategy as well as a long-term aim. We can never back down from our guiding premise that prisons are harmful, violent and oppressive, do not keep communities safe and cannot be allowed to continue to exist.

I'd like to end this section with one of my favourite quotes about prison struggle:

*“The issue of incarceration itself - including not just political prisoners but the prison as a system - needs to be framed as a fundamental question of building and defending our movements. This is a movement rooted in care: It means supporting prisoners as part of a movement culture where people care for one another, create new bonds of solidarity, and celebrate people’s history. This is a movement focused on shrinking the state’s capacity to repress: It means working to close prisons, end solitary confinement, free prisoners, eliminate borders. It means embedding direct challenges to the carceral state within social struggles while working to popularise a wider set of radical politics. While no one organisation can do everything, a successful anti-prison movement will need to synthesize direct action, popular relevancy, and radical critique. To separate these victories is to grant victory to the prison state.”*

- Dan Berger, *The Struggle Within*<sup>15</sup>

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## PRACTISING HERBALISM IN PRISON

When talking about practising herbalism in prisons, I want to be really clear that it isn't a solution in itself. Prison abolition is the solution. I advocate for prisoners to learn herbalism, to feel inspired, to receive a copy of *The Prisoner's Herbal*, but at the same time I don't think planting gardens in prison is going to make people's lives better. What we need is for this system to be destroyed and replaced with, for example, systems of community care. Sometimes people can be inspired thinking about gardening projects within prisons - and of course there are some beautiful examples - but for me, abolition is always the goal.

### **My experiences**

I got a job in the prison 'gardens' which weren't really gardens at all. They were more like small concrete courtyards with a triangle of grass in the middle. Sometimes there were beds with maybe some perennial cabbages and weeds, but in general it was really just concrete and a little triangle of grass. There were other gardens in the front-facing area of the prison that visitors and staff would walk through and those had roses. There was also a mother and baby unit where we built a herb garden and a vegetable patch.

So there were some opportunities for learning about horticulture, but generally it was pretty standard tasks like weeding. I didn't really weed of course.

I would harvest herbs and would leave roots growing in there - all without the garden officer noticing - because I wanted to come back to these amazing plants time and time again.

I mostly learned herbalism from older women on the gardens team and also from some women from Traveller backgrounds who knew loads about hedgerow medicine and different weeds and plant lore. These women were really impactful in my journey. I also experimented a lot. Sometimes I would smuggle weeds from my garden shift in my bra to take them back to my cell. We were searched at the end of every shift, and sometimes also when we got onto the wing, so I had to be sneaky.

People knew that I was the plant person. My room was always full of plants that I'd harvested. I even had roots drying on the prison radiator. I would sleep

with dandelion root under my pillow. Unfortunately, my cell got spun (searched) quite a lot, probably because I was the only drug-free person in the prison – I’m sort of ‘straight edge’ – and they needed to search a certain number of rooms for their quotas.

As I describe in *The Prisoner’s Herbal*, it wasn’t just about making medicine, it was really about connecting with plants and building a deep relationship with plants. It is about having a sense of comfort, knowing that you can grab that root and you can hold it when you hear horrific violence on the other side of the cell door and can’t do anything about it. That’s what herbal practice in prison looks like.

I also experimented with canteen remedies. Helen, an older woman who was a lifer in prison, used to have pepper tea. She was from Scotland, and she was always saying, “Oh, have some pepper tea, Nicole” whenever I had a cold. Just the regular black pepper from those tiny salt and pepper sachets, mixed in some hot water. It’s a circulatory stimulant, it kept us warm. And salt water for a gargle, for a sore throat, for a toothache, to wash a wound in something a bit cleaner than gross prison water.

I got some funding from this group called the Vegan Organic Network to do two herbal medicine courses through a distance learning program called the School of Natural Health Sciences.

I wouldn’t necessarily recommend them, but they were great while I was in prison. I also did a certificate in horticulture and permaculture. That was a 700-hour course and was just amazing. I didn’t get much physical practice at that time, but the theory and learning about plants was fantastic. These were all privately organised things, not enabled by the prison.

I brought together these experiences in *The Prisoner’s Herbal* book. My best friend, Sam, was experiencing cancer, having infections, struggling to take care of herself, and I just felt so hopeless not being able to get herbal medicines to her. I really wanted to write something where prisoners could do as much as possible for themselves on the inside.

The possibilities of making medicine in a prison environment are very limited. It’s less tinctures, infused oils and suppositories and more, what are five hundred things you can do with dandelion root? It’s all about being as creative as possible. I put together ten profiles of some of the herbs that I worked with in prison, including dandelion, plantain, yarrow, chickweed, mallow, nettle, chamomile, self-heal, daisy, and rose.

There is an extensive section on canteen remedies and how we can work medicinally with fruits, vegetables and different spices. I wasn't able to access these spices, but other prisoners in different prisons can. I went through canteen lists which friends sent out from different prisons. I looked up ones from the US and tried to think about what is potentially available to people and how they might be able to work with these items in a medicinal way.

There's also a section about connecting with plant allies. Not every prisoner has access to any outdoor space with plants. My friend Kevan, who's in solitary confinement, doesn't have an open access view to anything, just a hole in the roof of the courtyard where he can see the sky for fifteen minutes a day. He doesn't have garden beds, for example. He actually wrote a joke review of *The Prisoner's Herbal* saying something like 'We're being tortured enough in prison and then you torture me with this book.' I never published it, but I think it was pretty funny. In the book, I talk about connecting with plant allies, in terms of more spiritually and emotionally connecting with a plant. Maybe that's drawing a plant, studying it, working with it in a religious, maybe magical, way. There are lots of different forms of practice that don't necessarily mean medicine making.

There's a section on wound care. People often don't go to officers for wound treatment because it can imply that they've been involved in some sort of incident, so I wanted to put some basic first aid essentials in there, and also some creative strategies for wound healing with different herbal teas and things.

### **Distributing the book**

Around 3,000 copies of *The Prisoner's Herbal* have been distributed, mostly in the UK and the US, but also, to other places. We've got it to prisoners by advertising it in newspapers that are targeted at prisoners and newsletters, and via existing projects. Friends and family also request the book via my website. We donate copies in bulk to existing prisoner book projects. These projects are creating amazing, super important infrastructure for getting books into people inside.

There are two translated versions, both in Spanish. One is distributed in Spain and the other one has been distributed in Mexico. The Greek, Italian, and German versions are very nearly finished. People are also working on a French version. I'm incredibly excited about all of these translation projects.

The book's been super well received in Mexico, even though it's written in an English context. People have really found it inspiring in terms of connecting

to plants of their own lineages and they're working on a second edition where they're going to have contributions from prisoners in Mexico and Chile, with their own experiences and relationship to plant medicine.

### **Herbalism and liberation**

For prisoners, herbalism can bring a sense of connection and relationship. It brings strength from the natural world and aliveness. It's really inspiring and creates joy. There's a practical element too of overcoming powerlessness and building health autonomy. During the start of the Covid-19 pandemic,

my friend Sven who was in prison set up something where a group collectively combined their spices to take care of people who were sick. They made strong infusions of turmeric heated in soy milk and left them outside the doors of people who were locked in and isolated because of Covid-19. It really warmed my heart so much to know that the book was being useful like that. I've got hundreds of examples like that.

Herbs can support us to be in a 'safe and social' state, a parasympathetic nervous system state, for resting and digesting. Prison creates an unrelenting state of hypervigilance and hyperarousal. Those feelings can ultimately help us survive, but I think herbalism can create some escape, safety and connection even for a short time.

It's a passion for many of us, and a great hobby. It's a source of stimulation and learning. Plant ally work is spiritual support and ancestral support too, with an anti-colonial legacy. In the UK, for example, so many people are inside because of the importation of drugs. I had a partner inside who was from the Caribbean, from St. Lucia, and for her, having access to different spices really took her back to her home. I think herbalism can be very subversive in terms of helping us connect with our roots.

There are many ways to practise herbalism in prison, and I encourage anyone inside themselves or supporting someone inside to request a copy of *The Prisoner's Herbal*, which is posted free to prisoners worldwide:

<https://solidarityapothecary.org/prisonersherbalrequest/>



## TRAUMA RECOVERY AND ABOLITION: STATE VIOLENCE, PTSD AND HEALING JUSTICE

In February 2019, the scales completely tipped on my mental health and the overwhelm I experienced triggered a bad episode. I was debilitated by post traumatic stress for over two months in a major nervous breakdown. For the first time in 15 years, I had to take a step back from prisoner support, leave my projects and get signed off sick from work as literally any mention of the word 'prison' spiralled me out of control into aggressive states of rage and anxiety.

I wrote this piece below in the midst of the breakdown as I battled with the grief of not knowing what to do when this movement has been my life. I asked the questions: what will it take to heal? How does recovery relate to abolition? How do we support survivors of state violence recover and resist?

I've included this piece because I feel it illuminates the reality of PTSD. It also links trauma to movements for abolition which is a central theme of this book. The original writing:

Shaped from the age of 16 when my first partner went to prison, I feel like prison has moulded my body. Because I was so young (21) when I went in, that somehow now prison is a part of me. That I'm trapped forever. That I will never be able to erase that experience so it will haunt me for the rest of my life. Which explains why I have been hell-bent on abolition because I am somehow trying to destroy my own memories, abolish my own past. The same way that we avenge people's deaths like somehow the vengeance will heal our loss, our grief.

I have been hooked on revenge because I thought it would heal me, I thought it would stop the pain. And yes, my organising has been generative of huge amounts of solidarity, visible resistance and genuine outcomes for people's survival and strength... but it only kept my demons at bay for as long as I had the strength to fight them. The strength to repress. The strength to silence the ghosts and the memories with workaholicism. The ability to maintain a state of anger and rage, which propelled me for years and years.

But eventually, we become fatigued of war, fatigued of war with the state and its overwhelming violence. We become fatigued of war with ourselves, of the exhausting endurance we subject ourselves to. The performance of strength and

the glamour that we are doing okay, it was a long time ago, I've had therapy etc.

And we dwell on those we have left there, still behind enemy lines and the responsibility weighs heavy on our chests. And the weight crushes any other dreams or desires as we cannot move on because our hearts are looking back for those we love who remain imprisoned. And every phone call from a friend inside takes me back to that place. The smell of the tobacco on the phone piece, the barks of screws, the scarred skin and the rooms with no air and no keys. And every visit, I re-enter the prison and go through the same rituals of repression, when all I want to do is rip the throat out of the officer searching me, while I am forced to wait and obey in order to keep seeing those that I love.

And every re-experiencing of that place numbs my heart because to feel it all would shatter it. For years, I would lie next to a lover, unable to feel their lips on my skin, so beyond my body that unless they wielded some force upon me, I could not feel anything at all. Because to feel love is to feel pain, to feel loss, to feel captivity, to feel enclosing walls, to feel deeply unsafe. If you are lucky enough to know a sense of safety before prison, then you can at least grieve the feeling because stepping inside those walls evaporates whatever you thought you knew about safety in your body. Hypervigilance becomes you. It holds your skeleton up.

The only way to not go mad is to leave your body behind. Yet this creates its own form of insanity, where you can no longer exist in a world that requires you to 'know your body'. So separate from its flesh, you can no longer feel its hunger, its tiredness, its cues that it's asking you to slow down, to rest. And so on release, you don't need officers to control you or target you, you are now completely capable of destroying yourself, of wrecking your body with drugs and alcohol, or through an addiction to war and revenge.



'Destroy what destroys you'. The abolition of prisons becomes a fight to abolish your own trauma, yet you are like a fox caught in a trap. The more you move the more flesh you rip and the more you bleed. The more I engaged in abolition, the more that my life became dominated by prison, the more I gave power to those memories. Verbalising the pain brought it



all to life again. Like I had conjured the ghosts once more.

So now I am trapped between struggles to erase and struggles to embrace. The desire to walk away from it all is huge as if the only freedom comes with a lock and a key to that part of my psyche. Yet the abandonment of my friends feels too unbearable to accept. Knowing the pain of abandonment in prison, doing that to them seems beyond comprehension.

And so now the task is to find a way beyond abandonment and repression that will enable me to put my ghosts to rest, be there for my friends and be part of a movement to abolish prisons. Is this the healing justice I have always sought? What could that look like in our movements?

We want ex-prisoners and prisoners to lead this struggle yet without recognition of trauma recovery, we may as well be leading them to the slaughter. So is my next state of abolition less about war and more about healing? What collective resources can we leverage to support our loved ones in recovery from prison? For me, it's plant medicines, yet there are many tools in the toolbox and the time is now to support each other to heal our wounds. To find healing in ways that do not involve re-imprisonment or yet more state violence (such as being sectioned to a psychiatric hospital). To find healing in ways that build mutual aid, reconnection and relationship. To recognise that abolition is as much about trauma recovery as it is about resistance. That reclaiming life from trauma is resistance. That recovery must be a politicised act and a collective endeavour.

Prison dehumanises you so brutally. It becomes you against the world and so loneliness is the default, not only in surviving your sentence but in navigating recovery. I do not want to be alone anymore in this. I don't want to drop out of a movement in order to reclaim some sanity from this PTSD. I want to feel loved and supported and held by comrades. Prison makes you disappear, it destroys your relationships. I don't want to lose all the family and friendships I have built through engaging in abolition organising. I don't want to disappear because I don't have the capacity to organise right now. So I return to the question, what will it take to heal? And where do we start?

## HEALING FROM INCARCERATION

Healing from incarceration could easily be an article about healing from trauma in general. Incarceration is ultimately traumatic. However, I do feel there are some nuances that make incarceration, imprisonment, and captivity differently traumatising in a way that demands their own responses. The compounding nature of trauma in prison coupled with its normalisation and invisibilisation in society compared to other forms of trauma make it challenging to recognise and recover from. Likewise, it's not like life can not always become easier for people once they are 'free' due to the structural oppression that exists. This piece attempts to dive into the complexity of healing from incarceration. It's written for people being released from prison, whether that was yesterday or two decades ago. In the words of a former IRA prisoner *"You can never really leave prison, because prison never really leaves you."*

### **The trauma of incarceration: what makes prison so traumatic?**

**Fear and threat to life** - Prison is a state of prolonged, repeated trauma with an inability to escape. Incarceration is an overwhelming experience that can significantly change people - socially, emotionally and physiologically. While all prisons are different, it is extremely common to experience an ongoing threat to life - to fear for our safety. Examples include frequent violence from officers 'bending people up', prisoners attacking each other, threats of sexual violence and so on. People surrounding us may be frequently self-harming or trying to take their own lives. We may experience these things ourselves, or we may be witnessing them regularly. Either way, it will compound a feeling that we are deeply unsafe.

**Powerlessness** - Prison is designed to create a dynamic of overwhelming powerlessness. People are commonly forced to violate their own moral principles. There is a surrendering to the violence against us and others which can rupture what it means to be human. For example, I have quite a strong anarchist identity; even at school I would always stand up to bullies, anti-authoritarianism came naturally to me. But in prison, you commonly have to 'stand still' and witness people being bent up and dragged to segregation by groups of officers. You know if you interfere, that you will be subject to the same treatment (or worse),

you know that trying to get involved feels somehow ‘pointless’ because you are powerless to stop the violence you are seeing. This created a rupture in me, in my identity. It generated many feelings of shame, which through support after prison I could transform into self compassion for both the freeze response of the body experiencing trauma, and also how overriding this powerlessness can be.

**Lack of control** - People in prison have an unrelenting lack of control over their lives. From the smallest thing - like accessing more toilet paper - to when they will access parole, nearly every decision is controlled by others. Lack of control and consistent uncertainty create havoc for the bodymindsoul. This is worsened for people serving indeterminate sentences (those without a fixed release date), such as the IPP sentence which greatly affected my best friend Taylor and contributed to his suicide. His original tariff was four years and he served a massive thirteen years, the constant uncertainty of when he would be released drove him to absolute despair.

**Hypervigilance and immobilisation** - Prison forces people to live in a state of hyperarousal and hypervigilance for sometimes years on end. The fight or flight energy of the nervous system can be released in brief moments of relief (exercise, fighting etc), but in general, this surge of mobilisation has nowhere to go. This is especially true when people are physically immobilised in a cell. I believe it's this massive mix of acute and chronic sympathetic nervous system activation coupled with immobility (being locked in a 2 x 3m cell for sometimes 23 hours a day) that makes incarceration so traumatic for the body.

**Coercive control** - Prison is coercive control. Prison officers gain control and power by eroding a person's autonomy and self-esteem through acts of intimidation, threats, and humiliation. We associate coercive control as a dynamic in interpersonal violence such as an abusive husband, but these patterns repeat systemically in prison. Legally, coercive control is defined as: “*a pattern of behaviour which seeks to undermine a person's self-esteem or sense of self, and restrict or remove their liberty or freedom. It describes a variety of controlling acts including manipulation, intimidation, sexual coercion, gaslighting (a form of psychological abuse in which a victim is manipulated into doubting their own memory and sanity).*”<sup>1</sup>

Every aspect is present in prison, often from multiple people (including several officers and sometimes other prisoners). There is no escape. I just want to name that many people entering prison will have come from an environment of coercive control (for example, an abusive childhood or a violent relationship) therefore, prison can be even more triggering and compounding of someone's trauma.

**Severing from support** - Prison disconnects and severs people from the support they need. Calls and visits are a lifeline, but many people are deprived of these due to economic and other circumstances. There are exceptions but many people feel abandoned and cast alone, increasing the traumatisation of imprisonment. There is so much research that support mitigates trauma, for example, a person having someone soothe them by the roadside after a car accident while waiting for an ambulance reduces the likelihood of developing PTSD<sup>2</sup>. Prison is especially traumatic because we are lonely, isolated and separated from many sources of support. While most people develop some kind of support system inside through friendships, it can not be taken for granted that this is the same for everyone. There are many barriers to building relationships and finding affinity with people especially for people trapped in solitary confinement who have no options for socialising or seeking support from people around them.

**Dissociation** - In order to endure imprisonment, dissociation is absolutely necessary. Dissociation is when we feel separated from our bodies. For some, this can be through substances (in prison or after). Prison severs a person's relationship to their body and in order to survive, they have to disconnect. This has long-term effects, even after prison, in a person's ability to live fully.

**Shame** - Prisons are considered natural, normal and necessary in society. The experiences of the prisoner are normalised and justified in the phrase, "do the crime, do the time". Jokes about 'dropping the soap' and prison rape are common. The trauma of the person in prison becomes invisibilised, unnamed, and unrecognised. People may look at issues that led to prison but fail to identify the traumatisation of imprisonment itself. People may identify active addiction or childhood abuse, for example, as risk factors of what has traumatised someone, but they fail to see that prison itself is traumatising. Whatever people go through, popular culture believes you deserved it. Shame is a common trauma dynamic and is built-in to the prison system - society hates you and you loathe yourself.

**Multiple Layers of Trauma and Oppression** - As I shared in the introduction to this prisons section of the book, author Karlene Faith writes that "Prison is the place where all injustices converge." In addition to all the common trauma dynamics in the points above, prison will also magnify and enable all other forms of oppression. Prisoners are targeted with racial violence and transphobia through attacks and sexual violence. People experience ableism, and all other forms of oppression.

These are just a handful of points about what makes prison so traumatic. The

next section briefly explores some of the health impacts of incarceration before we ask the important question: how the hell do we heal from incarceration?

## **Health Impacts of Incarceration**

Over many years I have witnessed the mental and physical health of my friends who I'm supporting inside decline. The brutality of the prison system takes its toll. Two friends died in the hands of the state. Prisoners experience intense medical neglect. My best friend Sam missed nine operations for her cancer due to cancellations by the private prison she was in. Each time the NHS assembled an entire theatre team only to find Sam was a no-show. Because of security reasons, prisons don't tell you when you are due to go out for health appointments. She knew she was not getting the treatment she needed and we took political and legal action to pressure the prison, but we had no idea the extent of the failings of the prison. The surgeon told me that she was three millimetres away from death by the time they finally operated. The prison also failed to communicate test results and neglected necessary post-surgery aftercare where she contracted infection after infection.

I write about medical neglect in prison at the beginning of *The Prisoner's Herbal*: “*For people reading this in prison, you will not be surprised. you will have witnessed, and most likely, experienced medical neglect yourself. You will have been in pain and been unable to access painkillers, or seen people begging for medical attention completely ignored by prison officers. When I was in prison, a girl even miscarried and was left alone to bleed out in her cell before being unlocked the next day.*”

Chronic illnesses in prison are commonly left untreated and people have next to no options for self-care. They are dependent on prison officers for the most basic of needs, such as accessing pain relief. Accessing medication can be a massive challenge. There are large numbers of people with disabilities in prison, and prison itself is a disabling environment. Infectious diseases occur at much higher rates. One study from the so-called United States showed that individuals living in ‘correctional facilities’ are approximately three times more likely to have HIV or AIDS and are more likely to have hepatitis C and tuberculosis<sup>3</sup>.

Nothing illuminates the disparities of healthcare in prison than the Covid-19 pandemic. The death rate of people in prison dying from Covid-19 was three times the rate of people on the outside<sup>4</sup>. One of the saddest statistics I ever read was that the average age of death for people in prison in the UK is just 56 years old (when the national average life expectancy is roughly 80 years)<sup>5</sup>.

What is less researched is the long-term effects of incarceration on people's health. I believe, however, we can draw on studies of how trauma and chronic stress affect health long-term. This is something I dive more deeply into in my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress Course* where we explore the connections between trauma, chronic illness, and inflammation.

Authors Rupa Marya and Raj Patel, write in the highly recommended book *Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice* about the connections between chronic stress and inflammation:

*“Stress is the main mechanism that the body has to mobilize resources to address a perturbation in homeostasis. When something has been damaged or is under threat of being damaged, the stress response activates the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems, mobilizing pro-inflammatory cytokines and hormones to allow us to adapt in the short term. When those systems are chronically activated, the body experiences increasing wear and tear. Chronic stress’s cumulative toll is called allostatic load, and the biological expression is chronic inflammation.”*

There are multiple drivers of chronic stress and disease or ‘dis-ease’. Our bodies are complex and everyone has a different ‘fault line’ for how stress manifests in their body. Long term studies have shown that people who experience ‘adverse childhood experiences’ e.g. the majority of people in prison, have increased chances of developing different diseases<sup>6</sup>. Parental forces (how we’ve been treated by our primary parents) are important, but they are not the only people or systems that influence us. There are many forces that shape our bodies in childhood and adulthood from nutrition to oppression, including state violence.

Trauma may mean that we have ‘sympathetic dominance’ e.g. the fight or flight response is commonly activated and often our dominant state (where we are in this state more than others). When this state is dominant, we may have altered brain activity, increased stress hormone activity, altered metabolism, increased inflammation and oxidative stress, disordered immunity and increased rates of biological ageing. This is the tip of the iceberg in terms of mechanisms in the body that contribute to chronic illness due to trauma.

There are a million and one expressions of illness that may manifest, in different patterns in each individual. Studies have shown trauma’s connection to everything from musculoskeletal pain, fatigue and fibromyalgia, to arthritis, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, inflammatory bowel disease, diabetes, allergies and autoimmune diseases and many many more iterations

of chronic illness<sup>7</sup>. The nature of prison and its unrelenting chronic stress is no doubt having an intimate effect on people's bodies.

The reason I share about the health effects of incarceration is because it's not just mental or emotional consequences, many people leaving prison will also need to 'heal from incarceration' in terms of their bodies and physical health. This is what brought me to study herbalism at a clinical level - because the chronic stress I had endured generated an extremely challenging 'chronic illness hole' that I struggled to get out of without support. Ultimately it was plant medicines that supported me to heal my tissues, get inflammation under control and teach my nervous system different ways of being i.e to learn how to be in parasympathetic much more, enable rest and recovery of my tissues.

### **Healing from incarceration: the stages**

I just want to emphasise before I dive into these stages that I'm not a therapist! These reflections come from my own journey of healing from incarceration and accompanying many other friends and comrades to recover from periods of imprisonment. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, no magic bullet. Trauma recovery is messy and incomplete and an ongoing journey. I've attempted to integrate these twists and turn them into a framework that can potentially offer more structure and support to others.

Getting out of prison is something that all prisoners dream of and fantasise about for however long their sentence is. We put so much pressure on ourselves and we imagine that everything is going to be amazing when we're out of prison. Unfortunately, we can experience a kind of shock from the change between reality and our expectations. A lot of people get out of prison and actually realise it's super difficult to cope, partly because of what they've just been through and how alienating and challenging and traumatic that was, but also because capitalism is difficult. All of the challenges that someone likely had before they went in will still exist, whether that's how to find work, pay the bills or how to not feel lonely. These challenges are likely to be bigger now because of everything someone has just been through. Ex-prisoners will also commonly face prejudice and discrimination in society and may have a lack of access to resources.

I'm fully aware that some of the things I write will feel impossible to you if you've just got out of prison. I also think this section might speak to people who, for example, have been out a long time and are surprised by how they're still consistently affected by their experiences. Wherever you are on your post-prison

journey, I hope there are some ideas and information here that can help you feel more joy, embodiedness, and safety in your life.

### **Release and survival**

The first stage of getting out of prison is what I think of as a ‘release and survival’ stage. It’s definitely not the time when you’re likely to be investing loads of energy in ‘healing’. You’re really going to be thinking ‘how do I get through each day?’ And basically your nervous system is still going to be vastly activated.

Every country has different systems of incarceration. In the UK when you get out, you generally have half of your sentence left on the outside, which is called your licence period, and literally, the smallest slip up - like being late to a probation appointment - can mean that you’re recalled back to prison.

In some ways, you’re not in prison, but in other ways, you are still very imprisoned by these conditions, and your nervous system is going to be constantly vigilant and stressed about not returning to prison. The effects of this period, the toll of hypervigilance and chronic stress, are quite psychologically underestimated.

Probably the best way to be kind to yourself right now is to manage your expectations. It’s important to understand that you’re still under enormous pressure and all these amazing fantasies you have about getting out might not be possible for you right now because you’re still in acute survival mode. You’re trying to save yourself from going back to prison. I think the priority for anyone in this stage is really about keeping yourself out, keeping yourself safe. I don’t mean this in the sense that I want everyone to comply with all these oppressive conditions. I mean that we need you on the outside. It can be hard to find reasons to stay out, to stay motivated, especially if you’re lonely or isolated, but I do think being out of prison is important for everyone. You matter, your body matters, your health matters, and so staying out also matters.

Part of the challenge is that when we get out of prison, our nervous systems are so overwhelmed that it can be very easy to become hyper-activated, become very distressed, even explosive. I’ve lost count of the amount of people I’ve supported who’ve got out and within a day have had a fight with someone in their bail hostel, or gotten really drunk, and got recalled to prison.

### **Know your nervous system**

It’s important to have an awareness of your nervous system. Know that you



are likely to be distressed, you're likely to be prone to hyperarousal, activation, getting angry, feeling irritability, rage, all of these things. It's completely understandable given that you've been held in a cage. Those explosive triggers threaten you, but how on earth do you regulate enough to avoid them? Unfortunately, probation, all these different social worker types, are going to be constantly pressing on your buttons, constantly pushing up against our triggers. Trying to keep your shit together can be really difficult and that's why I think it is important to invest in a bit of understanding about your nervous system so that you can try to "self-regulate" as much as possible. Learn to calm yourself and stay in control and find ways to not respond to these strategies by probation that are really setting you up to fail. I know in my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course I critique the focus on 'self regulation' a lot (because the world can be inherently dysregulating) but I think you do need to cling to any strategy at all that will help you.

For me, I would listen to music. I would have an iPod and would listen to music on my way to probation. I would listen to really ridiculous, heavy, vegan, straight-edge, hardcore music and that would make me feel like, "No, I'm not going back to prison. I'm strong." When I went into that room, I was actually in a much better place because that music makes me feel stronger and calmer. I'm sure other people listening to it will have a headache and freak out, but for me, it makes me feel safe and in control. Connected to a bigger movement. That was important for me. For you, it might be listening to classical music on the way to your appointments. Or meditating. I've never been a skilled meditator by any means at all, I know it can be contraindicated for people with PTSD, but, you know, maybe it works for you, and listening to some audio or something to help regulate you and calm you down before interacting with these different authority figures could be really helpful. Again, this isn't about compliance for compliance sake - I care about you, and I care about you staying out of prison.

### **Finding any safety we can**

I think the priority is trying to find a sense of safety, because prison takes away any access to feelings of safety that is possible for us. I recognise that just because you're out of prison doesn't necessarily mean you're safe in any way. They purposely put people in unsafe environments like bail hostels, where there's a lot of drugs and fights and violence and stuff. I was incredibly privileged to be able to move in with my mum and stepdad in a really wonderful rural location. I had lots of access to land, which I think is a situation pretty much never given

to most prisoners. I've supported a lot of people that have been released into central Bristol, for example, but even in cities, there are places that can help us feel safe. Maybe you have a favourite cafe or a park or a woodland. Maybe you live by the sea. Maybe there's a calm churchyard nearby. Finding somewhere where we feel safe is so important because it gives our nervous system a chance to breathe.

Getting out of prison, we have to relearn what safety means. It's so unfamiliar that we have to just find it again almost from scratch. Generally it's hard to feel safe when you're alone. And so, for me, it was connecting with plants and other non-humans that created a sense of safety for me. But we also need friends, right? We need people we can "co-regulate" with - people who can support us to feel more 'safe and social'. I know that not everyone getting out of prison will have friends or family. I'm very aware of that reality. I'm also very aware that prison purposely affects and destroys and takes our friendships away, especially if you're doing a long sentence. I don't want to assume you have a friend that makes you feel safe, but if you do, they will be your biggest support. And having someone that you can spend time with who makes you feel calmer, who has your back, is really, really important.

If you can, find some kind of safe space to talk about your feelings whether that's friendships, ideally, or counselling. I know affording counselling for most working-class people is an absolute nightmare. And I know that private counselling is super expensive and not accessible for people.

I am also writing this book for people doing solidarity work and one of the things that people can do is to fundraise, to pay for quality care for people. I don't believe that sending everyone who's distressed off to a counsellor is going to solve everything, but I have had counselling myself and I think it is one way that can help you release and process and access perspective and support. Finding someone you trust to be able to safely disclose what's going on for you is really important because prison creates this weird environment where you're surrounded by people who constantly lie to you. Officers constantly lie. They say, "Oh yeah, I've made an appointment with healthcare." "Oh no, the post hasn't come today." "Oh no, you don't have anything like that." And it's all just lies, right? Our probation officers lie to us. And even other prisoners lie to us. "Oh no, I didn't take your tobacco." So, I think part of getting out of prison and healing from it is somehow trying to navigate truth and lies, knowing who we can trust, and who we can't. Just being aware of that as a lens of your life is really important.

## **Self-censorship and disclosure**

Another aspect of prison that makes disclosure about our experiences and history very confusing is the tendency we have to self-censor. My mum would come and visit me in prison, and I wouldn't want to upset her or cause her distress, so for her I'd said I was fine, I was working in the gym. I was studying and doing really well. I didn't talk to her about the frequent suicide attempts I saw every day or the frequent examples of self-harm or the violence or the officers trying to come on to me. I never told her about any of that stuff. Prison creates a weird sense of self-repression in you when getting out, you're with a bunch of people who have no idea what you've just been through, so how you talk to them and what you talk to them about and what stories you share or don't share is really difficult.

Unfortunately people will judge you for being in prison. They will think you're a certain sort of person or you can't be trusted. They will have all their own preconceptions of what prison is like. Maybe they'll start making jokes about prison, which for you, if your best friend's just died in prison, is not going to be fun. You're going to be interacting with news articles where people want to bring back the death penalty, and all of this stuff, or you'll be talking to someone at the benefits office and they treat you like you're subhuman. I'm afraid it's going to happen and you need to be prepared for it.

If you aren't able to talk to people easily, then more solo forms of self-expression, such as writing, making a zine, poetry, music, graffiti, anything, can be very healing. Loads of people have made really beautiful offerings based on their time in prison. Anything that can help you find avenues of self-expression, I think, is really important.

## **Control and agency**

The other aspect of prison is that it dramatically controls you, right? It sounds obvious, but it's all about power, control, and coercion. It's about taking away agency and autonomy. Healing from incarceration is about increasing that agency for yourself, increasing the power and control you have over your own life, increasing your own autonomy. And that's really hard to do if you've been institutionalised, if you've done a really long sentence. It can be the most basic of things. You need to be able to express choice, whether that's choosing what food you're going to eat or what clothes you're going to buy.

I would never pick someone up from prison with a bag of clothes that I'd bought for them, for example. They've been wearing prison clothes the whole time; they've had no options. Instead, I would take them shopping and they can choose what they want to buy. Anything you can do to help exercise that muscle of self-autonomy can be helpful. Maybe it's an exercise regime or deciding on a course or choosing a book, just constantly building up that confidence again to make your own choices.

At the same time, we should be cautious about people who want to paternalistically control someone. A lot of charity workers are like this - when people get out of prison, they're very controlling of them and their money. For anarchists and people engaged in solidarity work, it's important to always think about increasing agency and autonomy. Even if that sometimes means that people are going to make mistakes, spend money on things they don't need. If that's made them feel alive and a bit free, then that's okay.

### **Certainty and uncertainty**

Another aspect that makes prison especially traumatic is that it takes away certainty. Uncertainty is a very common trauma dynamic and makes certain situations very stressful. Precarity under capitalism is a constant source of stress - where is my next meal coming from? How am I going to financially survive this next thing?

I had quite a chaotic childhood. I lived in twenty-one houses by the time I was sixteen and I never knew where we were going to move to next. I never knew who my mum was going to have a relationship with next. There was constant uncertainty for me, and in a weird way I think that is what made me the planner and the control freak that I am because I have to create a sense of internal certainty.

So when I was experiencing repression, I would be making plans of what I would do if I got a five-year sentence, or a ten-year sentence. And I think it's the same when people get out. Making plans for yourself is so important because it gives you a sense of control. Even though you might be pissing in the wind, so to speak, with all the pressures you're up against, having some kind of intentions and goals and reasons for you to stay out of prison are really important. Do you want to get your kid back who's gone into care? Do you want to go to university? Do you want to get fit in the gym? Seizing those goals on release, whatever they are, is really, really important. It gives you a sense of meaning and purpose, and some sense of agency.

## **Releasing energy**

Imprisonment and incarceration are very immobilising things, so we have huge amounts of nervous system energy building up every single day because of the stressful environment, but it's got nowhere to go - you're literally locked in a cage. Finding ways to release this energy when we get out is really important, and movement can be a big part of that. I'm aware that people have different abilities around movement, and it looks different for everyone. It might be little stretches in our room, or dancing or walking or running or going to the gym, for example. All of these things can help our bodies release all this built-up rage and anger and frustration. I eventually learned a tool called trauma releasing exercises which involves triggering shaking in my own body to help release trauma and that was life changing for me. I talk about this in the *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course.

## **Relationships**

Relationships are another massive factor of healing from incarceration. Prison can change your ability to be intimate with people. We make all these jokes inside that, when we get out, we're literally going to fuck the taxi driver who picks us up. Everyone's just desperate and gagging for it, but then you actually get out and realise that being touched is scary. Being intimate is complicated. It can be confusing especially if you have someone that you were previously intimate with and now you're in a very different place to where you were before prison.

Intimate relationships can be hard because of how prisons affect us and our nervous systems and also the fear of going back to prison. It can be very scary to start a new relationship if you think you're going to lose that person. What if you go back and they abandon you while you're there? You don't want to affect them if you go back inside. There are all these weird, complicated things to navigate.

The other factor is that prison might have screwed up a lot of your relationships. People might have abandoned you when you really needed them. Or cheated on you while you were in prison. Or just stopped visiting you. There's a real dance when you get out of repairing some relationships that feel important enough to repair. And also just getting acceptance and letting people go. I let go of some really close friends because I knew I'd never be able to trust them again. That was painful, but also empowering. And other people hurt me while I was in prison, but we've rebuilt that and worked through that. The

reason I talk about building relationships with plants is because relationships are really what heal us. Just messaging friends, or having gentle phone calls, might be enough if you can't face being around people physically. Brief cups of tea or coffee can be a lot easier than people wanting to go out partying with you or hang out in massive groups. Those experiences can feel super socially alienating after a lot of time in prison, especially if you've been in solitary confinement.

On a personal level, I rejected intimacy and relationships for a long time because I was scared of going back to prison and I didn't trust people. On reflection, I think that was actually what the state wanted. The state wants to alienate us, and actually, continuing to love people is a form of resistance. There is a war for our hearts somehow and having the courage to have intimate relationships, to allow the healing that they can bring is really important. Intimacy is really terrifying after prison but it's something that I would never want to lose now.

## **Dissociation**

Feeling separated from your body is an absolutely essential survival strategy in prison. If you were completely aware of your body and your surroundings every moment of every day, it would be unbearable. The prevalence of spice (synthetic cannabinoids) and other drugs in prisons is because people want time out, they want to check out of that environment.

But we also need tools to re-associate, to re-inhabit our body. One of the simplest exercises I know is just having a shower and trying to notice how the water feels on different parts of your body. Put your hand under the water or your foot under the water and really feel the sensations there. Other practices like yoga, massage, touch, and body work can also be helpful. Again, those are not always affordable or accessible for people. But people involved in solidarity projects could offer that to people who've been in prison. After years of not being touched by someone, it can be an absolute nightmare to navigate, so having that skilled support could be really empowering. Our bodies store much more than we're conscious of. The effects of prison are held in our tissues and having support in that respect can take us a long way.

## **Taking care of our bodies**

I know getting registered for healthcare can be a massive faff. It's logistically difficult and might not be your top priority, but when you can, get a check-up

with the dentist and the doctor. Get a full set of blood tests, to check for infectious diseases or anaemia. I was so severely anaemic when I got out of prison. I really encourage ex-prisoners to see a herbalist if you're able to or someone who has a lot of training in holistic healthcare and nutrition. They might be able to help you address the way that your body's been expressing distress, whether that's musculoskeletal pain or digestive or other problems.

We might be expressing our distress emotionally through bouts of anger and rage or it might be nightmares, freeze and shut down responses. I think it takes a lot of time and self-observation, and sometimes observation from other people like a counsellor or close friends, for us to really understand how we are expressing distress. Please see the section '*trauma and the body*' for more examples.

I really encourage people to look at this trauma response framework that I talk about in the introduction, which looks at different stages – release, rest, reconnection and also resistance. Deeper healing can come from engaging in these frameworks and getting collective support. It doesn't have to be linear by any means but moving through these different steps can help. After a very traumatic period of incarceration, you might just need a serious rest.

You might just need to lie in bed and watch TV for six months and that's what your nervous system needs. You might want to go and hide yourself somewhere and be completely alone. Or maybe you want to never be alone again, you might want to be constantly with a close friend or a partner or adopt a rescue dog. Everyone is different. I think this is the time to be selfish in the sense of really checking in with yourself and finding out what you need.

I put a lot of pressure on myself to heal quickly – too quickly – and now I keep coming across this idea that 'the slower we go, the faster we get there.' We need slowness and gentleness. We need to gently understand our experiences and make changes in our nervous systems. We need gentleness to feel into a safe and social state. What we don't need is an adrenalised, workaholic response of "I must do everything I can to feel better and get better and not be sick".

I've learned that the antidote to trauma is actually joy. Prison is so dehumanising, and it takes so much joy away from us, that rediscovering joy is a part of healing. I remember once I was with some close friends, new friends from a campaign, who took me to this place called Worm's Head on the Gower Peninsular in South Wales. It was beautiful, and we camped overnight in this location that gets completely cut off by the sea. In the morning we went swimming in the sea, and three seals popped up around me, and it was just one of the best moments of my life.

In that moment, I remember realising that joy is my revenge. The fact that I can still access this joy, and feel alive, and experience the magic and the awe and the wonder of being alive, that was the best medicine for me. After that, I became much more open to experiencing joy, being vulnerable and having intimate relationships with people, prioritising days off by the beach, all of that. Reclaiming joy is very important. There's a really nice book called *Joyful Militancy* that talks about this.

### **Rebuilding your identity**

There is a kind of quest after prison to rebuild your own identity. In prison I wasn't allowed most of the CDs and books and things I needed. I wasn't allowed to be in contact with people with shared politics or values. Getting out, I had a sense of, 'who am I?' Prison and repression take so much away from us and finding ways to rebuild your own identity - finding new interests or passions, or reconnecting with old ones - is really important. It's about having the courage to re-find yourself again.

### **Resistance and recovery**

This might just be a strong part of my personal identity, but for me, fighting back against what's been trying to destroy us has been very therapeutic. In hindsight though, I think I threw myself into resistance too fast after prison, and I didn't prioritise things like rest or recovery or joy or counselling. I just went to all-out war against the prison system. I was involved in various abolitionist collectives and projects and was supporting loads of people in prison. My whole life became dominated by prison.

I have seen ex-prisoners get involved in campaigns and that has been very therapeutic for them because they've been able to share their experiences and feel validated and feel seen. They've been able to take action for their friends, which they couldn't do when they were in prison for example. Prisoner family members have been able to feel like people care about them and feel some sense of collective power and I think ultimately that is what keeps me coming back to organising. It overcomes the feeling of powerlessness that society creates in us, and it brings me into close contact with other people with shared values, shared purpose and meaning.

When it's the right time for you, I would encourage you to see if there are places you could volunteer with, or people you could organise with, or collectives



you could join. Look for projects that will give you support and purpose and meaning and help you use all those horrible experiences and all that trauma and somehow compost it so that you can support other people. But take it slowly. Find the work that helps you heal and rediscover yourself too.

I just want to share again that my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course is open to all, no one is turned away for lack of funds. I also support former prisoners one-to-one with my clinic for whatever they can afford (including supporting people for free).

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## HERBAL SUPPORT FOR NIGHTMARES

Nightmares can be one of the most challenging symptoms of traumatic stress. For years I was plagued by the same nightmare - that I'm in a prison cell and the walls are closing inch by inch. They would never completely envelop me but it felt like I could be experiencing the feeling for hours at a time and that I was slowly going to be crushed to death by the cell walls.

Nightmares have been quite heavily researched but still remain a mystery. There are different cultural relationships to nightmares worldwide, with different cultures attributing them to communication from ancestors, as premonitions or more. We don't know for sure what causes nightmares or have definitive ways of preventing them from reoccurring, but it's very clear there is a strong trauma connection.

You may have heard of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. It's the stage of sleep associated with memory consolidation, emotional processing, brain development, and dreaming. Nightmares tend to occur in this REM stage and when this occurs on the cusp between sleeping and waking, it means that we actually remember our nightmares and their terrifying images.

Some things we know that contribute to nightmares include stress and anxiety, irregular sleep, medications and various mental health challenges such as bipolar disorder. Overwhelmingly, nightmares occur with trauma and PTSD. A University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine study, published in 2009 in 'Sleep Medicine Clinics', found that eighty percent of people experiencing PTSD have frequent nightmares<sup>1</sup>.

Deirdre Barrett, PhD, author of *Trauma and Dreams* says that in post-traumatic nightmares, the region of the brain involved in fear behaviours, including the amygdala, a structure deep in the brain that works to identify potential threats, may be overactive or overly sensitive<sup>2</sup>.

### **Non herbal support for nightmares**

- Reducing sympathetic activation of the nervous system through the day - basically, less stress in the day time - means less stress at night. Falling asleep after being in a parasympathetic state means that more restful,

deeper sleep is more likely.

- Avoiding triggers especially before sleep. For myself, I had to basically stop attending organising meetings in the evening that were centred on prisoner support or prison-related things. The toll was too much and every time afterwards, I'd have a nightmare. This intervention has made a massive difference to my life preventing the 'hangover' effect the next day from waking to a nightmare. Sometimes it's not possible to avoid our PTSD triggers but whatever we can avoid, especially before we sleep, will make a difference. General sleep hygiene is important.
- Treating trauma. Working with tools that support brain processing and memory consolidation such as EDMR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and Brainspotting can help to process traumatic memories. This was seriously life changing for me.
- Nutritional deficiencies. There are varying levels of research around nutritional deficiencies and nightmares. Some vitamins and minerals suggested to have an impact on the prevalence of nightmares include: Vitamin D<sup>3</sup> and Vitamin B1 or Thiamine.

There is more research around nutritional deficiencies and PTSD symptoms, which I explore in my *Herbalism, PTSD & Traumatic Stress* course in depth. It's worth noting that chronic stress in general depletes our reserves, as well as just existing in a capitalist food system, so therefore we can presume nutritional deficiencies are very common for people experiencing traumatic stress. If someone has been incarcerated this is especially true. Common nutritional deficiencies for people with PTSD that may be worsening their symptoms include:

- Vitamin D
- Magnesium
- Fatty Acids
- Zinc
- B vitamins especially B12, B6, B9
- Ferritin/Iron
- Iodine
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin E
- Calcium
- Chromium



*Lavender*

- Vitamin K

There may also be a blood sugar element that could be worth investigating.

Food intolerances. If you're like me and completely gluten-intolerant, you'll know that when you have accidental contamination, it can majorly affect your mood and sleep. It took me a long time to clock the connection, but I have noticed an increase in nightmares after accidentally consuming gluten. There is research about celiac disease and its effect on sleep<sup>4</sup>.

Medication. It could be worth checking the medication you're taking and if there are recorded side effects of increased nightmares. According to the Sleep Foundation, certain beta blockers, stimulants, antidepressants, antibiotics, melatonin supplements, and other drugs can contribute to nightmares. Nightmares may also occur after stopping the use of some medications including certain barbiturates, antidepressants, and benzodiazepines<sup>5</sup>.

## Herbal support for nightmares

### **Lavender**, *Lavandula spp*

Lavender is one of those herbs that is so common and used in cosmetics that it is certainly taken for granted and underused medicinally. It's one of our most beautiful nervines offering a combined relaxant and uplifting effect. It's also extremely well researched. It reduces sympathetic activation of the nervous system, calms restlessness and anxiety.

Lavender is amazing as an infused oil (for example dried lavender flowers infused in olive oil) that can be rubbed on the temples or massaged into muscles. Lavender is most commonly used as an essential oil whereby just a few drops on a pillow can support sleep. There are also long traditions of dried lavender being wrapped in cloth to make sleep pillows. You can also make a lavender tea and tincture.

Cautions: Some people may have a reaction to the essential oil (especially if it's poorer quality). Caution with low blood pressure or if taking strong tranquilisers due to lavender's sedative effects.

**Chamomile**, *Chamaemelum nobile* (Roman chamomile), *Matricaria chamomilla* (German Chamomile), *Matricaria discoidea*

Chamomile is another very underestimated nervine herb. It's known as a 'quieting herb' due to its relaxant and calming properties. I consider chamomile

particularly helpful where nightmares may be due to some kind of unaddressed allergy, food intolerance or form of inflammation in the body due to its inflammation modulating properties. Chamomile is useful during the daytime to reduce the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, which will aid a more restful sleep. Folk records have been found in Norfolk recording chamomile's uses in inducing sleep and preventing nightmares<sup>6</sup>. It's especially recommended for children experiencing nightmares and sleep disturbances.

Chamomile is fantastic taken as a tea, tincture or glycerite. The essential oil is also lovely in a carrier oil such as almond or coconut oil for a gentle massage before sleep. You can also add it to baths and foot baths.

Cautions: careful in case of allergy to the asteraceae family (the daisy family).

### **Vervain**, *Verbena officinalis*

Vervain is such a beautiful and powerful tonic for the nervous system that has been used for thousands of years and was one of the nine sacred herbs for the Druids. It is especially supportive for people trying to recover from nervous exhaustion, as well as chronic illness and fatigue (which are exhausting in and of themselves). Vervain is great for anyone struggling with excess tension and chronic stress. Vervain can support many of the symptoms we develop when enduring stress such as headaches, migraines, insomnia, high blood pressure and general aches and pains.

In terms of nightmares, vervain can aid sleep issues such as nightmares because of their overall tonic support for the nervous system. I do not find vervain to have the same kind of relaxant action that will aid you in falling asleep (like lavender, for example) but I think it can help to shift nightmares longer-term by aiding recovery of trauma where nervous exhaustion is a large component.

Vervain is great taken as a long-term tincture from the fresh or dried herb. It's also commonly drunk as a tea in France and other countries. I haven't found it effective as a glycerite so far in my experimentation.

Cautions: avoid in pregnancy, caution with nursing. Caution with blood thinning medication.

### **Betony**, *Betonica officinalis* syn. *Stachys officinalis*

Betony is a subtle sedative that is helpful in recovery from nervous exhaustion. It has an affinity with the liver, which is under a lot of stress from the constant

processing of stress hormones and pollution in life under capitalism. It improves circulation to the head, reducing headaches caused by poor circulation and also relieves nerve pain in neuralgia and sciatica. I used it similarly to vervain - it's less of a herb that will help you get to sleep but more of a herb that will help you recover from long-term burnout, exhaustion and trauma due to its trophorestorative actions.

Throughout the mediaeval period, betony was considered one of the best protection medicines<sup>7</sup>. In folk tradition, betony was often hung above beds or placed in dream pillows to protect against nightmares and promote restful sleep.

Betony as support for nightmares has emerged throughout herbal history:

*“Bauhin and the Old English Herbarium commence their list of the uses of betony with a protective influence, keeping safe men’s bodies and souls, especially after dark, when nightmares and terrifying visions may arise. The plant protects holy places and sepulchres from such fearful sights. Only Dalechamps cites Musa by name on this aspect of betony, concluding that ‘it is holy’. Our other authors, including Dioscorides and Pliny, do not mention the claim, except Grieve, who cites Apelius’. As a remedy for nightmares, it pops up later in Bartram and again in Menzies-Trull.”*<sup>8</sup>

Betony is fantastic as a tincture with fresh or dried herb. It's also great as a tea. Unfortunately, I haven't found that it makes an effective glycerite in my experimentation.

Cautions: avoid in pregnancy. Caution with blood pressure medications.

### **Skullcap**, *Scutellaria lateriflora*, *Scutellaria galericulata*

NB – There are more than 300 species of skullcap growing around the world used traditionally for many similar and different purposes. *Scutellaria lateriflora* is native to North America. It is used traditionally by the Cherokee Nation (Aniyvwiya) and was appropriated by settler colonialists. It is now widely cultivated<sup>9</sup>. In England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, our native species are *Scutellaria galericulata* and *Scutellaria minor*. Another commonly used medicinal plant with differently used actions is Baikal Skullcap, *Scutellaria baicalensis* that is native to Siberia and Asia.

Skullcap is such a wonderful tonic to the nervous system and nerve trophorestorative which acts to tonify, strengthen, and restore the proper structure and function of the nervous system. It's probably one of my most dispensed herbs to people experiencing sleep disturbances due to PTSD and traumatic stress. The cold-infusion is strongly sedating and can help the nervous

system prepare for sleep, resettling sleeping patterns over time. It is the one herb that dramatically shifted the quantity and severity of nightmares I was experiencing.

Herbalist Alexis. J Cunningsfolk writes how “*Skullcap restores strength to an overwhelmed nervous system, relieving spasms, nerve pain, and cultivating calm. For nervousness, fear, and a sense of being overwhelmed, Skullcap stimulates the brain to produce more endorphins in the system due to the presence of scutellarin in the plant which becomes scutellarein in the body.*”<sup>10</sup>.

Skullcap is fantastic made as a strong tea/infusion and drunk cold about one hour before bed. It's also great as a tincture made with the fresh or dried herb. Unfortunately, I've not found it as effective or sedating as a glycerite during my experimentation.

Cautions: avoid in pregnancy, caution in nursing. Caution when driving/using machinery etc. due to its sedating nature.

### **Passionflower**, *Passiflora incarnata*

Passionflower is a gentle sedative and nervous system relaxant that has a long traditional use in supporting people with sleep disturbances. It is especially helpful in cases of insomnia or where one cannot get to sleep due to racing thoughts/restlessness, a lot of sympathetic nervous system activation and general anxiety. It can support you to fall asleep when taken before bed. Passionflower can also be taken throughout the day to reduce anxiety.

Because passionflower can promote deeper sleep, some people may experience more vivid dreaming (including nightmares) especially if they have not been accessing this deeper stage of sleep. This is a challenging situation because this can make us turn away from a herb as nightmares are so distressing, however, without deep sleep we cannot adequately process traumatic memories. I therefore recommend some gentle persistence to see if it settles, but if not, then definitely stop taking passionflower and listen to your body. Other herbs such as skullcap offer a similar sedative effect with less occurrence of traumatic dreams (in my experience supporting people).

Passionflower is fantastic as a tincture with the fresh or dried herb to aid with sleep. It also makes a great glycerite when made using the warm infusion method. During the daytime, the tea can support with anxiety.

Caution with depression and antidepressant medications, barbiturates and sedative medications. Caution in pregnancy (in terms of trimester and dosage).

## Other herbs

There are many herbs that are more ‘psychoactive’ that are beyond the scope of this book. One herb commonly promoted without much trauma nuance, in my opinion, is mugwort, *Artemisia vulgaris*. It’s recommended as a ‘dreaming herb’ and many people take it for the visions they have working with mugwort. This kind of spiritual work is very important and does play a role in trauma recovery. However, I encourage caution - it may not be appropriate for people with significant unprocessed trauma (such as someone getting out of prison). In my experience, it has given me horrific nightmares at every use and I know other people have had similar experiences.

I also recommend caution with valerian, *Valeriana officinalis* and hops, *Humulus lupulus* as they can worsen nightmares in many people.

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## THE RELENTLESS ROLLER COASTER OF PRISONER SUPPORT

This is an adaptation of a piece I wrote in 2017 as part of the series that became my *Overcoming Burnout* book. Despite it being several years old, it still rings true which is why I have included it. This is because this book will be distributed to loved ones of prisoners and former prisoners, but also because many people reading this book will hopefully feel inspired to get active in prisoner support work.

This piece is about the relentless emotional roller coaster of prisoner support. Something that has sucked the life out of me and pushed me to physical, financial and emotional exhaustion.

I have no doubt that folks organising this support are likely to have felt the emotions I describe in this article. I can only really truthfully share my own experience and can't speak for others, but I know that I am one of the millions of people around the world that are deeply harmed by the imprisonment of people they love.

And while I believe prisoners should be at the centre of conversations around prison, those doing the support work on the outside are also commonly forgotten and invisible. I hope this post sheds some light on the daily experience of millions. This is how I commonly feel:

**Alone** – There is a loneliness in prisoner support. Politically, it is extremely under-valued work that very few people do in a dedicated way. When it is someone you love inside, the feeling of loneliness creeps into every cell of your body - not only do you feel alone in the experience of actually coping with what is happening, but you miss them. You miss them so much sometimes you can't breathe. If they are a big part of your life and then they are taken away, it is like a gaping hole in your existence that no one and nothing can fill.

**Fear** – Prisons control society through fear. Likewise, the fear for people you love behind those walls starts to control your own life. I believe that prisons are inherently violent. The act of caging a human being is violent enough on its own, but prisons are rife with violence. It is built into their very design. Every day I fear that my friends will be attacked by officers (very rarely by other prisoners but of course it happens, and frequently more so in men's prisons). I fear that

they will self-harm. I fear that they will be successful in their suicide attempts. I fear I will let them down or harm them if I'm not able to support them in the way that I want to. These are not 'irrational' fears, they are very real, built on years of close calls and lived experience.

**Lost** – When my first partner went to prison when I was 16, I literally had no idea what I was meant to do. I didn't know I could book a reception visit, I didn't know how much money he needed or what the hell I could write in a card. Even now, a decade and a half later, I still feel like I don't know what I'm doing sometimes. There is no manual for this stuff.

**Anxiety** – Missing a phone call from someone in prison ignites a certain kind of anxiety in your chest, especially if it continues and you don't know what's happening or how they are. Sitting on a phone for four hours desperately trying to book a visit ignites anxiety. A train being late before a prison visit makes you want to smash glass with your bare fists. I've gotten a lot better with meditation, paying attention to my breathing and so on. – but some days literally the only feeling I feel is pure and total anxiety pumping through my veins.

**Dread** – One morning I turned up to visit my friend Sam in HMP Holloway. She'd been feeling pretty suicidal but I thought she was improving. I was booked in, searched and processed, then sat in the busy visits room waiting for her to arrive. I waited. And waited. I asked a screw what the hold up was and they told me they'd make a call. I waited some more. I then got asked to go into a separate room. "She was taken to hospital this morning," they told me. "Is she alive?" I asked. "We cannot disclose that information". I screamed. I demanded answers but was refused them. I left with a feeling of dread that brought my guts into my mouth. I took the tube, then the train back home, checking my phone every ten seconds. I repeatedly called the prison. Still no answers. I honestly believed she had died. Just after 5pm that night, I had a call from an officer at the hospital telling me Sam had tried to kill herself. She had quietly saved up her medication and it was a miracle she didn't die. She discharged herself from the hospital and I returned the next day to once more hold her in my arms. Every time I don't hear from her, every time she expresses she is suicidal, the same feeling of dread fills my lungs.

**Heaviness and sadness** – For anyone that knows me, they know I'm as strong as an ox but as sensitive as a sponge. I suck it all up. Visiting prison weighs on my chest as I witness the unending brutal injustices – the thousands of people locked up for basically being poor and vulnerable, or for those that fought back and took justice into their own hands. You see human beings dehumanised

beyond your imagination (and you're only seeing the ones that actually get visits). A den of trauma and abuse that is so vivid and real it haunts you. My friends that are trapped in prison and experiencing, witnessing and supporting other traumatised people need someone to offload on. So the pain parcel gets passed and you feel like you'll be buried in their suffering.

**Shame** – There is a feeling of shame in being an ex-prisoner, or supporting people inside. Even if you're defiant and critique the prison system, you still experience the unrelenting judgement and discrimination of others. Mentioning the word generates so many associations. Even when you buy snacks at a store and wait for a minibus to take you to the jail, you know that so many people are watching you and interacting with you like you are the scum of the earth. The prison officers treat you like a piece of shit (like they do prisoners). The media vilifies you and everyone believes it's your fault that you're there or it's your fault these people in prison are your friends.

**Exhaustion** – Sometimes holding the weight of the above on a daily basis reduces my body to an exhausted mess. Last year I did forty prison visits, and I'm sure it's part of what has knackered my adrenals. Emotionally coping and processing these ever-changing feelings is exhausting. Physically travelling to the other side of the country on a weekly basis is exhausting. Working my ass off to pay for my trains and their postal orders each month is exhausting. Organising politically around prisons and navigating the sheer judgement and prejudice is exhausting.

**Trapped** – I love my friends in prison, they have taught me so much about what it means to be alive, to be a human being. They have been incredible friends despite the reality they face every day. Their strength and defiance have inspired me so intensely. But there is a feeling of being trapped. I can't leave England for long because my girl needs to call my landline to off-load and talk, or I want to be here to visit urgently if needed. I feel like my life is on hold even when I'm doing my best to not be limited by this situation.

**Tiny and powerless** – My best friend did three months in segregation in HMP Holloway; she had a complete nervous breakdown after months of medical abuse and neglect. She would be brought up from seg for our visits and would tremble in fear. I've seen a lot of rescued animals with similar body language – swings of trembling and shaking followed by a frozen lifeless numbness. She was bruised from staff beatings, frequently stripped naked, and had to listen to other women being assaulted in separate cells. Her head would be swollen from banging it against the wall; cigarette burns blistered her skin. I would make daily

calls to the governors. I would write card after card and book visit after visit. But I have never, ever felt so completely powerless in my whole life.

The prison system dwarfs you. Any arrogance of power you may have gained from other life experiences just disintegrates in the totality of the abuse of power in the prison system. Knowing that someone you love is locked in a cage and there is nothing you can do to get them out other than try to navigate some bullshit system that was never designed to serve you or to be 'fair', feels like being in an ocean of powerlessness that you know you can't survive in, because no one ever taught you to swim. There is no one throwing you a lifejacket, and soon you will drown in this despair, amongst all the others that were only in the sea to feed the sharks.

**Anger and rage** – The only thing that does stop you from drowning is the pure anger and rage that pumps through your veins. I guess this is the fight or flight feeling. When flight isn't an option, you are left fighting with everything you have. I have felt such deep hatred, such deep rage and such full-bodied desire for retribution and vengeance, I have terrified myself. But once again, these kinds of emotions are mediated in our social movements, liberals try to calm us down and quell our rage. These feelings are dangerous because they might just disrupt the systems of oppression that prop up this society, not least the prison industrial complex (as introduced at the start of this chapter).

**Emotional repression** – I didn't even realise until writing this blog the extent to which prisoner support dominates my emotional well-being. Because for all the moments that I feel the above, there are many more where I don't feel anything at all. After every distressing phone call from my friends inside, I have to 'switch off' and return to 'normal', keep responding to emails or advertising courses or whatever. Not being able to feel somehow makes all of this easier at times.

**Unlovable** – No one wants to be around people that are sad, anxious or feeling despair, let alone on a regular basis. This culture thrives on 'positivity' and all that sickly stuff. Selfishly, one of the hardest things about prison support is that I feel unlovable. I fear that no one will want a relationship with someone carrying these kinds of 'burdens'. I don't always have the emotional energy to be there for partners. I can't travel loads, or be spontaneous. I can't always be joyful, sexy or funny, and more often than not I'll be that person leaving at the crack of dawn to make my way to another prison hellhole in some distant corner of the country. The anger and rage I feel about the prison system means that I'm relentless at organising - again, not always conducive to relationships.

I fear that there is a finite amount of love in my heart that is always giving out to keep my friends alive. I feel the weight of all the above so much that the last thing I would want to do is harm someone I loved by bringing this shitstorm of stress into their life.

### **How can we improve the support for the supporters?**

Once again, these are only my feelings and I can't speak to other people's preferences or needs:

**Show that you care.** Ask how people are. Ask how their friends inside are. Text them to say good luck on your prison visit today. Listen to them when they need someone to help them cry. Respect their wishes when they say they don't want to talk about it.

**Practically support people.** My friends in London have been so unendingly amazing by always offering me their sofas when I need a place to stay before prison visits. Help people out with lifts, with petrol, with money. If they've had a harrowing prison visit, pick them up from a train station. Give them a massage. Send them a sweet card. These small things make a huge difference.

**Create opportunities for joy.** The only antidote to the heaviness of these feelings are the moments of bliss that remind you life is worth living and not all the human race are violent prison officers. Go swimming in the sea. Be affectionate. Be silly. Send them stupid cat memes... whatever! Just bring joy into their life. They need it more than you know.

**Learn about the prison system.** Read *'Inside Time'*. Follow groups online. There is a phrase 'Rot doesn't grow where the sun shines' – we have to keep a light on the experiences of prisoners and the reality of prisons.

**Get involved in prisoner support groups.** Organise events, write to prisoners, build relationships with them and keep prisoner support visible. I know from experience so few people do this kind of work; you may get hundreds of demos depending on the issue, but trust me I've never seen more than a handful of people keeping prisoner support groups alive. Prisoner support isn't an 'extra' or an 'add-on' to other political movements, it must be a heartbeat. Those that are behind enemy lines must not be forgotten. Likewise, prisoner support is not just for people 'specialising' in it or focusing on it – it is the work of everyone.

**Get active to dismantle the prison industrial complex.** Organise with others on every front to bring this whole brutal system down.

## HERBS FOR PRISON VISITS

Visiting loved ones in prison has been a heart-wrenching activity since the dawn of prisons I'm sure. Seeing your loved one confined, surveilled by officers, distressed and unable to leave with you at the end of the visit is enough to break anyone's heart. Prison visiting regimes are different worldwide - in some countries close family members may only be able to see their loved ones once or twice a year, some only allow contact through a screen while in other countries conjugal visits are the norm. People may be imprisoned far away from their loved ones, often intentionally by the state. For example, Basque prisoners are commonly placed in prisons in the furthest south of Spain so that their families must endure arduous journeys to visit as part of broader state repression against movements for regional autonomy. In the United States, families may literally have to fly across time zones for an annual visit because of where their loved one has been forced to locate.

It's also worth saying that the majority of prisoners simply don't have anyone to visit them. Their close relationships may be fractured or they simply are alone without many loved ones in the world. For those with families, being able to visit may simply be financially impossible or too difficult because of caring responsibilities for children or elders, for example.

In the UK, people in prison are generally allowed a visit two to six times a month depending on the status of their 'privilege'. Prisoners being punished on a 'basic regime' may only have two visits a month, people on 'standard' (the majority of prisoners) may have one visit a week available, that usually lasts an hour. Prisoners who are enhanced (rewarded for good behaviour) in some prisons may be awarded two extra visits for good behaviour. Prisoners on remand without being convicted, may also have more visits - or visits that last longer - than those who have been convicted and sentenced. Some prisons have all of these on paper but overcrowding makes the reality of booking visits very different and so getting one once a month makes you 'lucky'.

Since I left prison at the very end of 2010, prison visits have been a near-weekly experience. Some months I made multiple visits a week depending on who was inside and what they were going through. They have been experiences that radically shaped my nervous system, health and finances; having a degenerative

impact on all of them. In hindsight, I can see after burnout and a nervous breakdown that reducing the number of visits I did would have been beneficial for my body and PTSD but I was so trauma-driven to be there for my friends in distress that it was a bit too late by the time I acknowledged the toll they were taking on me. I honestly think I managed for so long probably because of age and able-bodiedness at first, and absolute abuse of herbalism to keep me going when I should have been resting! Herbs are so incredible at helping support our immune system and energy levels, that we can sometimes overdo it when what we actually need is quality rest, sleep and parasympathetic time.

In this article I wanted to share advice on how to support yourself during a prison visit to reduce harm and impact, so that you can stay strong for your loved one and keep going.

### **The prison visit day cycle**

The cycle of what the body goes through for a visit is going to be completely different depending on your relationship to that person and the emotional stakes of the visit, your general temperament (like how anxious you feel normally), the travel involved and if you have support/accompaniment/someone with you. For me, prison visits have another layer somehow because I've been in prison myself so there is a PTSD element. I am viscerally reminded of my own incarceration through seeing officers, keys and locked doors, searches, smells. Likewise, friends I've supported through prison have often been super distressed whether that's feeling actively suicidal or coping with cancer, so the stakes of the visits have always felt very high, contributing to a lot of anxiety about getting there on time, not missing it and making the experience very emotionally challenging.

I like to think of the prison visit cycle in three stages:

**Pre-visit anxiety** - this is all the build up. For example, having to get up early to travel, or not sleeping well the night before due to anxiety. It may be the adrenaline of driving or travelling or catching connections on trains and buses and the constant anxiety of clock watching. Pre-visit anxiety involves all the emotional turbulence of what to expect.

**The visit** - often actually getting into the visit comes with massive relief. The waiting is over and you can finally 'relax' and focus on being with the person you care about. However, the visit comes with its own challenges. For example, being searched, or the reality of your loved one crying or being distressed. Surveillance

from officers. Not forgetting the heartbreaking goodbye.

**Post-visit feelings** - the ‘comedown’. Finally breathing out after lots of time pressure and emotional stress. Sometimes, you may feel calm and relaxed and even loved up and strengthened. I’ve often had that post visit ‘buzz’ if I’ve seen someone I’ve super missed and we’ve had a lush visit. Other times, it could be a super difficult journey home processing all the feelings and finally expressing the grief that comes with constantly leaving people we love in those hellholes. In terms of the body, we may feel exhausted or ‘wired and tired’.

### **So what support can help this whirlwind of a day?**

Our bodies are commonly in acute sympathetic fight or flight for a lot of the day and that’s a whole bunch of stress hormones and a lot of nervous energy. Maybe we feel anxiety in our stomach and our guts have ‘gone sideways’ for the day. Maybe we’ve got back or neck pain from all the tension and apprehension. We all express distress differently.

### **Nutritional and other support on visit days**

**Reducing stimulants** e.g. coffee. Having warm, comforting drinks is no bad thing when we are feeling emotional strain. And certainly most people can handle one coffee without ill effect (we are all constitutionally different). For me, I’m a high-energy, high adrenaline person with a lot of nervous system energy which means more than one coffee and I can easily get the shakes! So for me, swapping out the soya latte with something more cooling and calming like chamomile tea always helped. Especially pre-visit when my nerves were highest. If you’re able to, making a flask of your favourite herbal tea is ideal. This is how I would save money on expensive drinks, support my nervous system and get warmed up at cold train stations in the winter.

**Pre-making lunch or packing healthy snacks.** Any trip out the house means being vulnerable to all kinds of takeaways and fast food! While the options for healthy food on the go are slightly improving, we’re still being overloaded with sugar, preservatives, unhealthy fats and oils and so forth which are all often inflammatory. And don’t get me started on the desire to comfort eat when under emotional stress - our body literally craves sugar and fats especially when we’ve been in fight or flight. Therefore, having healthier alternatives on hand is a good hack. I like to pack nuts (walnuts, pecans, a couple of brazils) and 100% dark chocolate which is full of antioxidants, and is a good source of magnesium. It



scratches my itch when I'm craving chocolate after an emotionally stressful visit.

**Having friends for support.** Having friends to text or offload on is absolute magic. Whether it's someone to just update on the journey or someone I can splurge on afterwards, their love and care is invaluable. If one of your close friends is regularly doing prison visits, why not suggest making a group chat for them so you can shower them with wholesome memes on prison visit days? Be sure to check in with them and how they are feeling. Having this social support is absolutely invaluable.

**Preparing music playlists, podcasts etc.** I adore music, it's got me through everything in life. Having playlists on standby really helps ground me and strengthen me. Likewise, downloading podcasts to make the most of my time on a crowded train is really helpful!

**Meditation** - Meditation is not always the easiest for people with PTSD but many people find it extremely helpful. It could be that you could have an application like Headspace or many of the million of alternatives on standby just in case. Supporting yourself to access more of a parasympathetic nervous system state will pay dividends in terms of reducing the stress on you through the day.

**Having enough of a travel buffer.** I've really learnt over the years that the more time and spaciousness I have before a visit, the more my nervous system can relax. I am very lucky that my local ABC group has financially supported me over the recent years with prison visit costs because it means (especially during the Covid-19 pandemic) that I can stay at a hotel or Airbnb nearby the prison if I don't know anyone locally that can host me. It means I can get a relaxed train the day before, watch some trash and get a good night's sleep rather than getting up at 5am and being so stressed about making it to the prison on time. This one intervention has really made a difference to my nervous system over the years and made prison visits easier in general and less exhausting.

If driving, then regular stops and stretching breaks are important. I'm no stranger to long drives. Stopping at whatever services I can and having a ten minute walk around is so helpful, likewise doing sneaky stretches and rotations in the bathroom helps so much to reduce pain or the risk of a bad flare up.

## **Herbal support on visit days**

### **Immune support**

Our immune systems can take a bit of a battering on prison visit days with

early starts, late nights, congested buses and trains, emotional stress etc all combined. Taking preventative measures is really helpful. These herbs are very helpful:

**Echinacea**, *Echinacea purpurea*/*Echinacea angustifolia* - well researched plant for supporting the immune system particularly in cases of acute infection (like when it's just starting). It's a very accessible herb at wholefood stores or even supermarkets these days. You could take capsules or tincture in the morning of your visit.

**Elderberry**, *Sambucus nigra* - another well known herb with a lot of antiviral and antimicrobial properties that is helpful in preventing infections and treating acute infections. Try the elderberry syrup recipe in the Calais section of this book for an amazing elderberry cough syrup that can also be taken as a general preventative for colds and flu.



*Elderberry*

**Licorice tea** with vitamin C, *Glycyrrhiza glabra* - Licorice isn't the herb for everyone - there are a number of safety considerations to consider so please check these out before taking licorice. For me, a trick I've used on prison visit days for years is to combine licorice tea with a vitamin C dissolvable tablet. Vitamin C is great for me because I'm prone to allergies and high histamine levels (an expression of chronic stress in the body). I find the licorice and vitamin C combo a great nourishing sweet drink (sweetness is craved by the adrenals), licorice supports the adrenal system and is also antiviral and the vitamin C boosts the immune system amongst other

functions. It's easily transportable for me and is something more easy to make up for example in a hotel, then a cafetiere with loads of dried herbs!

**Schisandra**, *Schisandra chinensis* - Schisandra is a herb that has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for over 2000 years and has a long history of traditional and Indigenous use in China, Korea, Japan and eastern parts of Russia. Fortunately, it can be cultivated in temperate climates making it more sustainable to use. A short paragraph won't do this herb justice as it has a rich plant chemistry and a broad array of medicinal uses. Schisandra has strong antioxidant properties and strengthens the lungs, kidneys and adrenals. It helps

to lower elevated cortisol, reduces liver damage and protects against neuronal cell death and cognitive impairment. This means schisandra can help with concentration, memory, and general 'brain fog'. It can also support with fatigue, physical endurance and just in general to cope with stress. I call it my 'stamina herb'. It has many other medicinal uses beyond this! I think it's an amazing medicinal ally when we are under a lot of pressure and need back up through the day.

**Ashwagandha**, *Withania somnifera* - Ashwagandha has a vast and deep medicinal history all over South Asia, South Europe and parts of Africa, including in Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicine. Ashwagandha has a strong affinity with the HPA axis; the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis which involves the central nervous system and the endocrine system adjusting the balance of hormones in response to stress. This is something I talk about in more detail in the *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course. Ashwagandha reduces cortisol levels, supports with nervous exhaustion and supports the immune system (amongst a thousand other medicinal actions!). It's another 'stamina herb' that I include in blends for myself when I know that my systems will be taxed. It's not always appropriate for people with PTSD who have hyperarousal symptoms (anxiety and agitation) because it can be very stimulating. We also need to be careful that it doesn't enable unsustainable energy that drives us to burnout when what we really need is rest. However, for people enduring chronic stress beyond their control to change (such as prison), who are nervously exhausted and depleted, I think it's a powerful ally. Especially in a mixed blend with other more calming herbs.

**Astragalus**, *Astragalus membranaceus* - Astragalus is an amazing immune supporting herb. I want to share that it's not appropriate during acute infections (for example, if you're already sick) but it's a fantastic preventative and can help with improving the overall function of the immune system. It increases the production of antibodies and white blood cell formation. It can also support the cardiovascular system as an antioxidant and diuretic aiding heart function and blood pressure.

## **Liver support**

**Dandelion coffee**, *Taraxacum officinale* - Dandelion is a supreme ally for liver health. Herbalist Kami McBride describes dandelion's actions on the liver really clearly: "*It stimulates the flow of bile, which breaks down cholesterol and fat. Dandelion nurtures the liver in its assimilation and storage of vitamins, minerals and sugars. It improves*

blood filtration to remove old cells and harmful bacteria and helps maintain a healthy hormone balance. Liver health also plays an important role in regulating blood sugar and excreting accumulated waste. We are endowed with a liver that performs a thousand functions. It is just plain courteous to eat some herbs to reciprocate all the liver does to make us happy<sup>21</sup>. One of the most accessible ways of getting the benefits of dandelion is to have dandelion coffee - this is where the roots have already been processed and roasted and you can use a cafetiere to make it as you would a normal coffee. It is a thick dark liquid and delicious with some sweetened soya milk.

**Milk thistle**, *Silybum marianum* - I will add a teaspoon of milk thistle powder to my morning oats on prison visit days as an offering to my liver. Evidence exists that milk thistle may be hepatoprotective (protective to the liver) through a number of mechanisms. This includes antioxidant activity, blocking toxins, and anti-inflammatory effects<sup>2</sup>.

### **Nervous system support**

I've already talked about these plants in depth in other pieces of the book (see index). I love them in a blend to offer support through the day to help turn down background anxiety and support me to access a more parasympathetic state.

- Milky Oats, *Avena sativa*
- Vervain, *Verbena officinalis*
- Lemon Balm, *Melissa officinalis*
- Hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna*
- Chamomile tea if I can get it, *Matricaria chamomilla*

Flask of earl grey rooibos - I adore rooibos tea, it's an alternative to common tea with no caffeine. Earl grey uses the herb bergamot for flavour. Bergamot has its own nervine properties as a gentle relaxant, it's also surprisingly antioxidant and antimicrobial making it supportive of the immune system on long journeys with lots of exposure to bugs and germs!

**Prep in case of shock** - I like to have some herbs available to take in case the visit has taken a super difficult emotional turn, for example, after seeing a friend after their recent suicide attempt. See the herbal allies for emotional shock section for a variety of plant allies that are very supportive in these situations.

- Rose petal soother, *Rosa spp.*
- Motherwort, *Leonurus cardiaca*

- See other herbal allies for shock

**Sleep support** - I discuss these herbs in depth in the herbal support for nightmares section. Ensuring adequate sleep before and after a prison visit is really important for preventing a day with worse anxiety, and for recovering from one that's been especially triggering or upsetting. My favourites are:

- Skullcap tea, *Scutellaria lateriflora*
- Passionflower, *Passiflora incarnata*
- Lavender oil, *Lavandula spp.*

### **An example Prison Visit Blend**

If I'm travelling on the train and can't carry much, I'll often try to take just one blend with me in a small bottle. This is an example:

- Lemon Balm 25%
- Hawthorn 25%
- Rose 10%
- Elderberry 20%
- Schisandra 15%
- Licorice 5%

### **References**

1. McBride, K. (2019). *The herbal kitchen : bring lasting health to you and your family with 50 easy-to-find common herbs and over 250 recipes*. Newburyport, MA: Conari Press.
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK11896/>

## HERBS FOR HEARTBREAK & SUPPORT AFTER PRISON PHONE CALLS

Phone calls from loved ones in prison is a mainstay of prisoner support. Once again, access to the phone to make calls varies from prison to prison and country to country. Likewise, some prisoners who for example don't smoke, may be able to purchase more phone credit than others. Some people simply can't afford credit. For me, calls from people in prison is a big part of my day. Therefore, like all elements of prisoner support, it can be a roller coaster! Some calls can feel ecstatic and silly and joyful. Other calls may involve a lot of listening to someone's suicidal feelings and trigger feelings of hopelessness, sadness and despair. A bit like prison visits, we can feel pre-emptive anxiety about calls - fears of missing them, clockwatching to ensure we are available, anxiety if we haven't heard from someone. And afterwards we may experience a hangover effect or some kind of emotional comedown.

Like the herbs detailed in the herbal support for emotional shock section and herbs for prison visits, many are available to help us survive these experiences.

My favourites are:

- Flower essences such as rescue remedy
- Rose petal soother - a delicious rose glycerite that is sweet and nourishing
- Earl grey rooibos with rose water - I add a dash of rose water to my milky tea. This gives it a very soothing, nourishing feeling.
- Chocolate - I have a square of 100% dark chocolate, again for comfort and nervous system nourishment
- Lemon Balm - either fresh tea in the summer, or lemon balm glycerite
- Chamomile - either a cup of tea or a swig of chamomile glycerite
- Catnip, *Nepeta cataria*

Catnip is a herb I haven't introduced yet. It's another member of the legendary mint family that is home to so many of our beloved nervines. It's cooling as a nervine but also has a warming effect on digestion. Similar to other

mints, it can help us move into a parasympathetic nervous system state. It's got a strong affinity with the gut, so if you're someone whose tummy flips after a stressful phone call, catnip can be a great ally. I like to have fresh catnip tea in the summer months. In the winter, I may reach to the tincture. I love how herbalist Alexis J. Cunningsfolk describes the 'catmint personality' and feel it resonates with the complexity of emotions involved in prisoner support:

*"The Catnip personality: The image that most readily emerges in my mind when I think of Catnip folks is that of the iceberg. You think you know what you see when you look at them, but in fact there is a vastness to them that is hidden from view below the surface. Often early life experiences have taught them to keep things hidden away as an act of survival and protection. They believe that the surface that the rest of the world sees must remain calm and unflustered.*

*But underneath there is suffering and great pain. Sometimes it can feel like there is a tidal wave of emotions on the horizon and it feels like it will overwhelm them completely. Catnip serves as an ally to help folks like this do a number of things at once. First, is to help connect them with people who have their best interest in mind so that they have community support on their journey.*

*Next, is learning how to establish healthy boundaries that promote thriving instead of just surviving. And finally, Catnip can help cultivate that elusive sense of home and contentment that they yearn for. All of this helps Catnip folk to be able to experience their emotions without becoming incapacitated by them. To be vulnerable without feeling unsafe."*<sup>1</sup>



*Chamomile*

## References

1. *Catnip Plant Profile*, The Lunar Apothecary Course with Alexis J. Cunningsfolk

## HERBS FOR ANGER & RAGE

This was a blog post that I originally wrote in 2018. Unfortunately, Taylor who I mentioned is no longer with us after finally successfully killing himself in 2022. I've included this piece because anger and rage are common experiences of people surviving state violence. These herbs will be familiar but maybe reading about them in this context will bring them alive further. The original piece:

Yesterday was a hard day. Back to back calls from friends in prison. News that one of my closest friends, Taylor, had slashed his face open and tried to kill himself yet again. His self-harm and suicide attempts are escalating in number and extremity the longer he is in prison. He's now six years over tariff as an IPP prisoner, a sentence so unjust it was scrapped, yet he and thousands of others remain in a purgatory perpetually denied parole. My best friend Sam, whose journey with cancer and unrelenting medical neglect that I have been documenting, called and told me that her hospital appointment that she's been waiting for the last three months has just been postponed by the prison. RAGE.

I observed the stress hormones surging through my body. The frustration and anger coming to a head with sadness, desperation and grief at the sense of powerlessness I feel in this ongoing nightmare of the last decade. Like I do in nearly all situations, I reached for the plants. The plants that have kept me going all these years and so I thought it could be useful to share these herbal allies for anger and rage.

### **Dandelion Root**

I swear down, I want to be buried with dandelion roots. These babes have had my back for as long as I can remember. After the first phone call, I knew I had to ground myself - what better than root medicine? I made a cup of dandelion coffee and as soon as that taste hit my mouth I could feel my nervous system chill out. I'm a pretty 'hot' person and dandelions are always very powerful for me as they cool me down. They are a supreme liver ally



*Dandelion Root*



and it's well recognised that it can often be our liver that bears the brunt of the chronic stress we are constantly trying to process.

## Rose

In England, roses have a bit of a bad reputation, like they are somehow only the domain of posh gardeners or that they are only for vicarages or valentines cards. But honestly, roses are bad-ass medicines. Incredibly beautiful flowers and scents, combined with serious thorns that scream, "If you try it, I will hurt you!" – can you get more of a fierce femme remedy?!

When I'm full of anger and rage, rose softens me but not in a pacifying way. Not so much a 'calm down now' but more of a 'I got you, just breathe' kind of feeling. Yesterday I added dried rose petals in a little infuser and dropped it in my soya milk earl grey rooibos tea. It felt like a comfort blanket that allowed me to finally feel safe enough to cry.

Rose has been an amazing ally when I've been in a grief hole. The tincture is a wonderful support for the nervous system, and one I regularly post to people on trial or who are experiencing a hard time. Rose water is also a wonderful support and somehow more subtle than the tincture. Anna, my ex-partner who was killed last year, loved roses. Whether it was rose tea, or rose body lotion, rose shampoo. So now somehow roses are simultaneously a trigger for grief but also a massive ally for it. For people who can be emotionally shut-down or self-repressive of their feelings, rose can help gently open us up to remember to breathe.

## Skullcap

Skullcap is a serious ally for an overwhelmed nervous system. Herbalist Alexis J. Cunningsfolk, who I have been studying with over the last year writes how: "*For nervousness, fear, and a sense of being overwhelmed, Skullcap stimulates the brain to produce more endorphins in the system due to the presence of scutellarin in the plant which becomes scutellarein in the body. For those who suffer from insomnia, especially when there is difficulty shutting off the busy chatter of a restless mind, Skullcap helps promote healthy sleep patterns. The herb can be used for a variety of nervous conditions and imbalances stemming from hyperactivity including ADHD, anxiety, hypertension, nervous exhaustion, hysteria, neuralgia, pre-menstrual tension, and the affects of withdrawal from caffeine.*"<sup>1</sup>

I find skullcap knocks me out too much in the daytime, so I have an infusion before I go to bed. I always know when it's taken effect because my neck starts

to seek the pillow! I believe it's been a powerful ally that's helped to shift my rib pain due to its effect on my nervous system which has reduced the overall tension in my body. Skullcap has really helped my sleep including reducing nightmares which obviously helps the body in general to reduce inflammation, recover and build resilience to stress.

### **Calming down or fighting back?**

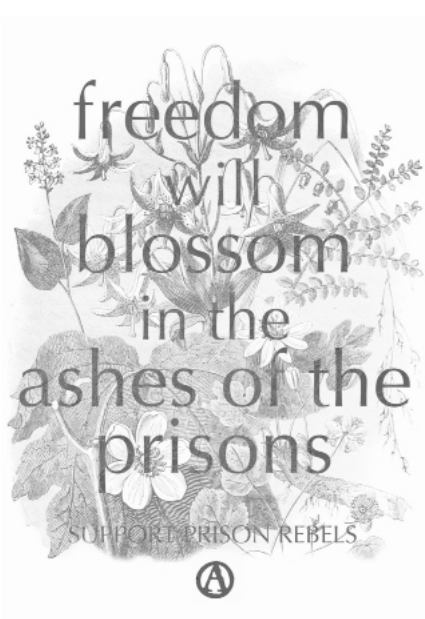
It's really common in herbal or alternative health circles to envision the desired state of human existence to somehow be as calm as a pond at all times. We learn that stress is 'toxic' and punish ourselves for our reactivity. If we get angry, we obviously haven't done enough personal development work. Yet, faced with the horror of state violence harming the people I love with all of my body, is it not totally normal to be angry? Is it not anger that propels me to fight to free IPP prisoners or to overturn Sam's conviction? Yes, it's love that drives me, that sustains me, but anger plays its role.

Yes, 100% we need to engage the parasympathetic nervous system for rest and recovery. I'm not minimising this, but I want to share from my heart that the aim of my herbalist practice is not pacification. I do not want to calm myself down – I want to channel my rage into fighting oppression from a deeply-grounded place. I want to nourish my body as a weapon and I want to sustain myself so that I can do this work over the long haul because it will take generations to dismantle these systems built by my ancestors.

So I work with plant allies not so that I can feel more serene about the daily violence I witness, but so that I can feel strong, supported and nourished to keep doing the difficult work of organising for liberation.

### **References**

1. *Skullcap Plant Profile*, The Lunar Apothecary Course with Alexis J. Cunningsfolk



## HERBAL ALLIES FOR GRIEF

It is hard, dare I say impossible, to be engaged in supporting people experiencing state violence or experiencing it yourself, without feeling grief. If you do prisoner solidarity work long enough, losing people you love behind bars is inevitable because the system is designed to take them from us. I've lost count of how many people I've met in Calais and Dunkirk who have then drowned trying to cross the Channel or who have been killed on railway tracks or hit by trucks. Not forgetting an entire family and their baby lost to the sea. The stories I heard from refugees leaving Ukraine of bombings, massacres and rape will haunt me forever.

While loss and grief are inevitable parts of human existence, the sheer volume of harm caused by state violence means that we are constantly accompanied by grief. For anyone who has bought this book because of trying to cope with some ongoing state repression, grief will also be familiar. We mourn the destruction of campaigns, collectives, relationships and things that gave our life meaning due to the force of the state.

Trauma in itself is the creation of grief - it is the rupture of what you once knew shattered into pieces. We may mourn who we once were before a particular traumatic experience. We may mourn how our loved ones have changed. I will never forget the impact of prison on a previous partner, and how their once tender intimacy and joyfulness was replaced with aggression and intolerance. How my life became about hypervigilance of their moods and I clung to memories of who they used to be before being confined to a cage. Trauma shapes us and changes us and all of these changes can generate grief, even if we haven't named it as such.

My book *Overcoming Burnout*, is a collection of writings from an intense period of burnout where I reflected on everything from how patriarchy makes me tired to ableism in grassroots movements. I wrote a piece there called 'Composting Grief' that I have included below because it speaks to this grief in movements that we often fail to articulate. I then move on to herbal support for grief.

## Composting grief

I knew it was inevitable that I would be writing about grief soon. I could feel the intensity of feelings build up, my dreams recalling distress and despair. The repeated failure at trying to sleep soundly. The inability to concentrate and feel gratitude for the millions of things that bring meaning to my life.

I didn't want to write about grief and focus on the experience of losing my best friend. I have been wanting to write about grief in the context of social struggle (of course the two aren't separate for me or many others). Of how we cope with our losses, with repression, with losing comrades and even the loss of different sides of ourselves as we engage in struggles for social change. And how unresolved grief burns us out. This is my attempt.

Grief is probably one of the most universalising of experiences. It is felt by billions. And yet even when knowing how shared it is as an experience and as an emotion, it feels like the loneliest place on earth. This last year, even though I'm surrounded by a beautiful caring family and incredible circle of friends, I have never, ever, felt so completely alone.

It feels like basic tasks are one hundred times harder. The emotional heaviness rests physically on my body. To feel joy again feels like a mountaineering expedition with no compass and no map.

In the books I have been reading to try and help heal from bereavement, authors John W. James and Russell Friedman describe grief as the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behaviour<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, grief is associated not just with the death of people we love, but with loss and change. The loss of relationships, homes and more. I had never viewed grief in this way and it made me realise how little we honour our grief in anarchist or social movements in the UK (let alone in society in general).

We might experience a campaign ending because of state repression. We might have invested years and years and then lost it all. We might lose friends to burnout, or to death at the hands of the state, or simply to poor health as an outcome of poverty and years of struggle. The animals we had to leave behind on an action might haunt our dreams. In a more distant, yet fully relational way, we might witness things that trigger deep sadness and despair, such as images of refugees drowning or pictures of slaughterhouses. With the relentless nature of the media documenting such tragedies, we are never far away from these feelings.

In the *Grief Recovery Workbook*, the authors encourage you to create a timeline

of all your losses, so you can discover which of them are the most self-restricting, the most ‘un-complete’ and painful. I’m starting to wonder whether doing this about a campaign would be really effective too – making a timeline and looking at different events and losses and how they felt to everyone engaged. When looking with this bird’s eye view, you can start to see the patterns. My observation on my graph was that I could begin to see how losses accumulate, and how each one just knocks us out that little bit more. We’re so busy focusing on getting through whatever it is we are coping with or working on, that we don’t often look behind us. We don’t often feel deeply the emotions we’ve repressed, silenced or minimised.

Likewise in many struggles, we don’t do this grief work collectively. We don’t sit down and share or process what we’ve learnt or how we’re feeling. We’re lucky if we reflect at all. I’m sure one-to-one, people engage in reflective conversations, however there is no collective grieving process. We might, at the bare minimum, learn from what tactically or strategically could have been different. There might be theoretical analysis in texts or talks at book fairs. But no one talks about how it feels.

So I’m going to start a trend. Because no one in the animal liberation movement wants to talk about what happened all those years ago. We are all still frightened of expressing our feelings for fear of public ridicule. Because we’ve been socially conditioning each other to believe that our feelings don’t mean anything because we suffer so little compared to animals. I am completely over organising in emotionally-illiterate social movements. I am completely done supporting so many people that experience all these emotions in private, yet the movement silences them in public.

How did I feel when the animal liberation movement was battered by repression? It felt terrifying, overwhelming, frightening, rage-inducing, degrading and completely dehumanising. I felt a deep sadness, a sense of loss and isolation, despair and darkness. An intense loneliness, recurring regret, shame, hate, guilt and feelings of betrayal. I felt completely unsafe and unsupported. I felt trapped in an emotional earthquake, with no steady ground anywhere. These feelings lasted for several years, and to be honest, they still surface. What I can see now is that these feelings relate to a sense of loss; they are the expressions of my bereavement and the dissolution of my identity rooted in a movement bigger than myself. They are the shattered dream of closing a lab that still tortures thousands of animals every day. Each morning I wake up and feel like a failure. The grief cannot be ‘completed’ because the goal has not been achieved.

The animal liberation movement in England cannot recover because it hasn't processed its grief.

James and Friedman write how we need to 'complete' our grief. Incompleteness is the accumulation of undelivered communications, large and small, that have emotional value to us. Politically, it may feel like our work is never complete, because the state still stands and the myriad of forms of oppression are still alive and kicking. But I believe movements can process grief better by reflecting on loss and change, and acknowledging how it has made us feel and what we have learnt (thus 'delivering' these communications).

In my most recent speaking tour in Europe, where I unfortunately got sick, I felt I finally acknowledged some of the emotional impacts that the ending of the SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty) campaign had meant in my life. Not just the tactical learnings, the need to increase our resilience to repression and so on, but the raw emotion of loss, regret and despair. Most likely because of my physical vulnerability, I opened up a bit more and talked about how it all felt, the regrets and the things I wished I/we had done differently. I was out of my comfort zone, that wild place where the healing happens.

We could process our grief by producing zines, writing articles, making art, doing talks and workshops. Even just gathering as friends. We need to document our own history and not let the state tell our story. Organisers that have been going at it for a long time especially need to be called upon to share their stories of change and losses in struggles. It may help newer folk feel more prepared for the inevitable losses and the rich learning we can take from them. And while we need to honour our grief on a movement-level, we also need to acknowledge the uniqueness of our experiences as individuals in relationship to loss, and share these feelings too, so others don't feel alone in their grief and despair.

Mixing this intense personal and movement-level work is our role in honouring our fallen comrades; for whom some are heroes they have never met, for others best friends. One such project is the documentary about Barry Horne, a committed Animal Liberation Front activist who lost his life in prison when on hunger strike. It is a project of transforming the pain of grief into political action. Barry was a huge inspiration to me as a kid, the grief of losing him was felt by the animal liberation movement so vibrantly and fully, I will never forget it.

We have to compost our grief. We have to find the rich learning from it, otherwise nothing new will grow. To really learn, we have to feel. And to heal we have to share our feelings, in public or private. We need to validate them

and use them to nourish the soil and grow stronger, more powerful and resilient resistance.

### **Herbal allies for grief**

This section has felt hard to write because it takes me back to my most recent bereavement and the role that plant medicines played in literally keeping me alive. In July 2022, I lost one of my best friends Taylor, whom this book is dedicated to. He bled to death in his prison cell after cutting his own throat. The IPP sentence (see glossary) and HMP Eastwood Park stole his life as freedom was constantly taken from the table. His suicide letters were full of despair at no longer being able to survive the unbearable sentence and the abuse in prison, including transphobia from several officers. He expressed the only freedom he had left – to end his own life.

For months, I was an absolute mess. There are no words for the grief, rage and pain. Thirteen years of friendship – feeling his care and love and enjoying his cheeky laugh. Thirteen years of trying to get him out, of trying to keep him alive. He's come close to death so many times but somehow I wildly underestimated how it would feel to finally lose him.

Despite my whole life being dedicated to resisting the state and supporting people experiencing state violence, the feeling of loneliness was unmatched. The first few weeks were propelled by rage and all the inevitable demands of organising the funeral, negotiating with the prison as his next of kin, finding legal representation for the inquest. Yet afterwards, it was complete exhaustion and sadness. I felt like a vessel of blood and tissues but nothing else, like my spirit had been completely sucked out of me.

I dreamt that all the herbs in my garden died. I stopped being able to make medicine. I lost all hope in abolition and just lay in bed for weeks. In polyvagal terms, my nervous system was in shutdown mode, like playing dead to survive. The only time I left the house was to visit my friend Sam in prison (Taylor's partner) to keep her from killing herself and joining him. Every time I visited the prison, in the car park I would see this rambling rose bush. I remember watching its pink-white flowers fading and falling over the summer months, and seeing rose hips in the autumn like a marker of time of how long it had been since losing him. Days turned into weeks that turned into months and then finally a year and now eighteen months as I write this.

I offer here thoughts on herbal support for grief based on the stages of grief

we can experience, with a note that they are not necessarily linear but shift like sands.

### **Acute grief, shock, anger and rage**

I encourage readers to return to the piece on police raids and herbal allies for emotional shock in the section on state repression, which describes many herbs relevant for this stage of grief. This includes gentle nervine relaxants such as lavender, chamomile and lemon balm, hawthorn, rose and motherwort for heart palpitations and soothing the emotional heart, milky oats for ongoing repression, passionflower, valerian, skullcap and wild lettuce for stronger sedative support and sleep.

For me at this stage, the more gentle nervines ‘didn’t hit the sides’. The level of sympathetic activation in my body was so high, I was so pumped with adrenaline and stress hormones, I felt like the Hulk. I felt like I could have literally turned over a car or smashed up a wall with a sledgehammer without any effort at all. The anger and rage were unmatched and it was impossible to sleep, to wind down, to feel any kind of parasympathetic energy. The only herb that helped during this time was Wild Lettuce, *Lactuca virosa*. This herb is one of our stronger hypnotic sedatives in our nervine category. I had the glycerite already to hand and it was only when I took a giant swig of it that I was able to finally collapse and sleep.

A similar sedating herb that can offer acute support like this is California Poppy, *Eschscholzia californica* which is a wonderful gentle sedative.

### **Heartache, mourning, hopelessness**

This is the stage where everything hurts. We feel smashed with heartache. We can feel lost, adrift, amiss. We ache for the people we love, we mourn our lives before they left us. Our days can be dominated by tearfulness or the constant feeling like we are going to cry. We may struggle to access happiness or appreciation for their role in our lives, and simply just want them back. Grief can also be extremely complicated - they may have been someone who hurt us or harmed us (like an abusive parent), we may feel a whole bunch of emotions at once, like relief or regret or mourn who we needed them to be that they weren’t. It’s simply a stage of all the feelings.

For this stage, I work with herbs that have an affinity for the emotional heart and the physical heart, both of which are feeling the impacts of grief. Herbs for



me at this time have commonly been rose, hawthorn and rosemary. I've spoken about rose and hawthorn endlessly in this book - they are incredible nervines with an affinity for the emotional heart and cardiovascular system that can be taken during times of shock, stress, emotional pain and grief.

Sometimes rose can be 'too much'. I've lost count of the amount of times I've shared samples of rose petal glycerite or tincture in workshops and people have just randomly burst into tears unexpectedly. It's a mover of emotions. It's like a hug telling you it's okay to cry, it's okay to feel. In this sense, sometimes rose is too much of an 'opener' in my experience. After losing Taylor, it took me a long time before I was ready for rose. Rose can be particularly helpful when we are actually denying ourselves the opportunity to move towards this stage of grief. If we can remain angry, we can somehow not surrender to why we are angry, to why we feel so much pain. With rose comes acceptance of loss and an honouring of how much we loved someone. Rose can support us when we feel an absence of love in my experience. Even if you feel acceptance around someone's death, for example, losing my grandad at ninety-four years old felt like an understandable right of passage. Like it was his time, he'd lived a full and vibrant life. But the grief, despite the acceptance of his death, just left a gaping hole of love. I simply missed him. There weren't complicated feelings like anger and regret. There was just the loss of his love and his presence. Here rose comes into its own. Rose can offer this love when we are really feeling its absence.

Hawthorn, for me, is more of a 'strengtheners'. It's like an acknowledgement of the pain and the heartache but brings a "You will get through this" energy. With hawthorn, we soothe our hearts and attend to the physical and emotional impacts of grief, whether that's the stress response of feeling anger and getting into fight or flight, or the impacts of tension and 'holding it in' in our muscles. We may be 'all cried out' and tired of sobbing. Hawthorn can soothe and nourish our blood vessels and can act as a gentle relaxant on the whole system. Hawthorn is good when we feel 'weak hearted' or drained of life energy.

Herbalist Sajah Popham describes this as: "*One of the clearest psychological indications for the usage of Hawthorn is for the individual who feels "weak-hearted."*" They



Rosemary

do not feel strength in their own hearts, strong within themselves, unclear in their path and connection to their true self. To me, it makes a weak heart strong, a confused heart clear, and a half-heart full.”<sup>2</sup>

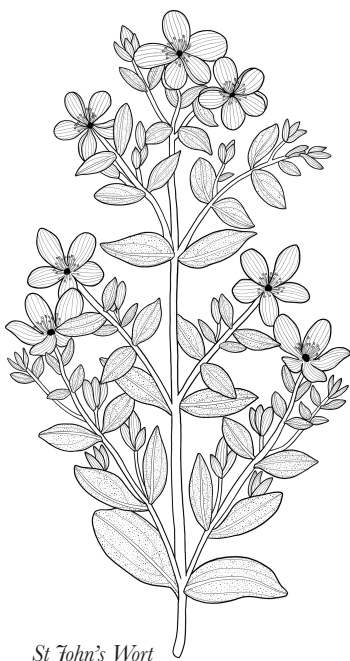
### **Rediscovery meaning, moving towards joy again**

After a period of loss, depression or regular depressive feelings, it can be hard to feel joy again. With time and space and support from loved ones, it is possible for that crack of hope to appear. Sometimes this comes much sooner than expected. Every experience of grief is different and how long it lasts is no testament to how much you love or miss the person you lost. I’ve been surprised at how quickly I’ve felt able to experience joy after losing someone, and often it’s not even one or the other - both joy and sadness are present. For other bereavements, joy felt like something that would never ever come again, that the sadness would never shift. For this stage of grief and sadness, a powerful herbal ally is St John’s Wort, *Hypericum perforatum* that I abbreviate to SJW.

Unlike many other of our nervines, SJW is gently warming in nature. In polyvagal terms, I see SJW helpful in supporting people to move out of shutdown or the body’s freeze response which often accompanies depression. SJW is

especially indicated for stagnant depression - which is delineated by the presence of irritability, frustration, and aggravation (which is a lot of activation fight or flight energy but commonly immobilised as we see in the freeze response).

There are a lot of research studies around SJW and depression, comparing it to medicines like Prozac (see the SJW plant profile). It is commonly commodified and sold internationally as a herbal ‘antidepressant’. However, the specific actions are not often explored nor the holistic nature of depression and how it takes a broad range of interventions to support someone experiencing depression.



*St John's Wort*

Taking a bottle of SJW is not going to counter the complex psycho-emotional consequences of living in a capitalist, racist and oppressive society. Likewise, there are many intersecting drivers of depression, from poverty to vitamin D deficiency and food allergies.

What's beautiful and interesting is that SJW is also an amazing wound healing herb in a first aid context. It's especially indicated for puncture wounds, it's antimicrobial and reduces inflammation. I work with SJW in bruise ointments for all kinds of soft tissue injuries. Likewise, it can help repair inflamed tissues internally in combination with other herbs.

This wound healing nature and mood enhancing, 'antidepressant' action is where I think SJW comes into its own in recovery from grief and despair. It is known in folk medicine as a 'sunshine herb' because its yellow flowers blossom at the peak of the summer. For myself, taking SJW reminds me energetically that it's okay to feel happiness, it's okay to move towards joy again and I think this is an essential stage in recovering from grief.

Just to note there are important safety considerations to take into account with SJW because of how it affects drug metabolism in the liver. It is strongly recommended to avoid using SJW when taking other selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's) and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOI's) for depression. It is contraindicated for use with sedative or hypnotic drugs, immunosuppressants, non-sedating antihistamines, contraceptives, antiretrovirals, anti-epileptic drugs, calcium channel blockers used for high blood pressure, cyclosporine, chemotherapy, macrolide antibiotics, and certain antifungals<sup>3</sup>.

When experiencing grief, it might be that you don't choose a herb but a herb chooses you. Any plant can support us through getting through something if we build a relationship with it. Maybe it's a huge linden tree in a local park that you sit under to feel calm, maybe it's a rose bush that reminds you of your grandmother's garden. Plant medicines come to us in so many different forms.

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## *Contribution: Remedies & Recipes*

### SISTER HEART COMPOUND FOR GRIEF

*Herbalista*

This compound provides emotional support during difficult times. The hawthorn and rose support the heart and the mimosa uplifts the spirit. This blend was based on David Winston's Grief Relief Formula with an added touch of cardamom to warm the formula and uplift. This recipe can be made by blending singles, or as a compound, using alcohol or glycerite based tinctures.

#### **Recipe**

- Glycerite Compound 1:5 Ratio, Glycerine 60%
- Alcohol-based Compound 1:5, 40% Brandy
- Mimosa Flower 1 part
- Rose Petals 1 part
- Hawthorn Berry 1 part
- Cardamom 1/8 part

**Dosage:** Take 1 tsp. (5 ml) as desired to support the heart, relieve stress and soothe your spirits!

**Contraindications:** With regular use, hawthorn berry can have a favorable effect on high blood pressure. If you are taking prescription medication for high blood pressure, please monitor your pressure regularly and take notice of any changes. And please, as always, use common sense.

*The Herbalista Health Network recognises healthcare as a fundamental human right and works to protect health access through clinical services and educational opportunities. We strive for a community based model of healthCARE that is based on solidarity and not charity. Learn more about the variety of Herbalista projects at <https://herbalista.org>*

*Contribution: Remedies & Recipes*  
**PLANT MAGIC - CRAFTING A RITUAL SMOKE INCENSE**

*Marinka*

**Grief in motion and resilience in action**

This ritual is a reclamation of your space, of your right to heal, to move and celebrate your journey safely. It is a practice to combat numbness with movement, to honour your rage and let your grief flow. The smoke swirling and twirling in the air is a language understood by your heart, connecting you to a wider support system. You are held within this space, your demand is heard, your story is received.

The following instructions will guide you on how to make your own loose incense. The plants you can work with are :

- Hawthorn berries - tends to the heart, assists the grieving process
- Rosemary - protects the space and activates energies
- Mugwort leaves - moves stagnant and numb feelings, invites space and movement in
- Nettle leaves - calls in resilience, strong boundaries and honours sacred rage

Depending where you are located, these plants are quite easy to find in the wild and forage responsibly; they can also be found dried at your local apothecary or in food stores. It is best to use them in dried form for this practice. You will only need a pinch of each for every ritual, or you can create your own mixture and store in an air-tight container.

**Other materials needed are:**

- A fire-safe bowl
- A charcoal disk
- Matches or lighter
- A journal

Before starting, if indoors, make sure your window is open, to ensure a safe practice. Choose a time where you will not be disturbed and set your space. If you wish, play some soft music. You may call in any guides, elements, ancestors or spirits to aid you. Gather your materials. Take a few deep breaths to ground yourself. Bring the herbs to your heart and take notice of any smell, colours, textures; pay attention, how do they make you feel? Set your intention for this ritual. It can be said out loud, or to yourself. Ask how you wish to be guided by your plant allies. This can be something like “help me move through this grief, help me feel safe in my body”, “please guide and nourish my heart”, “connect me with my rage, connect me with my joy, may I move through it all”. Again, take notice of how your words make you feel, if said out loud, how your voice resonates.

Light your charcoal disk and sprinkle a pinch of the dried herbs on it.

Let the smoke rise and repeat your intention.

Pay attention to shapes, smells.

Let the smoke touch you and tickle your skin. The plants are speaking.

You may write down or draw any insights, images or messages you are receiving. You may safely carry the bowl around your space, allowing the smoke to cleanse you and your surroundings. You may move and make shapes with your body, playing with the smoke. This moment is yours.

Once the practice is finished, thank your allies for their assistance. Notice any change in yourself. Reflect on what happened for a while, and gently allow it to leave you.

This ritual can be repeated as often as you like.

*Marinka (she/they) is a French/Dutch folk herbalist, witch, word-knitter, whose work focuses on accessible trauma-informed and radical healing, plant magic and communication, and a biocentric and queer approach to their environment. Instagram: @risingrootsapothecary*

*Contribution:*

## TRAUMA AND THE PRISON SYSTEM - HERBAL ALLIES FOR RESILIENCE AND REPRESSION

*Elsie Harp*

Let's think about trauma, the nervous system, and the prison system.

To be detained by the police is traumatising. My experience of detention by the police served as yet another incidence of trauma that my nervous system tried so desperately to support me through. Still, the psychological impact of being caged became too overwhelming, and I needed psychiatric support. It has been shown that those of us who have experienced trauma in childhood are more likely to come into contact with the police due to how trauma impacts our psychological functioning and can lead to behaviours that are easily misinterpreted by untrained police staff<sup>1</sup>.

### **The window of tolerance model and trauma**

When we have had repeated instances of stress on our lives our window of tolerance shrinks. Our window of tolerance is the space of psychological flexibility to be able to respond to challenges in a calm and rational way. If something triggers us we are able to self soothe and bring ourselves back into a calm space. We are able to recognise when we are inside our 'window of tolerance' through our physiological responses. Our breathing pattern is calm, we are feeling grounded and connected to the world, we are able to make clear decisions.

When we are triggered we can become 'hyperaroused' or 'hypoaroused'; this is our body perceiving and reacting to danger and threat. We can recognise hyper-arousal by excessive activation/energy often in the form of anxiety, panic, fear, hypervigilance, emotional flooding etc. When you're hyper-aroused it keeps your system stuck 'on' and impacts your ability to relax, often making it difficult to sleep, eat and digest food, and manage your emotions. At the most intensified level this may result in dissociative rage/hostility.

Hypoarousal may occur when we have too much hyperarousal. The body can only tolerate being in the hyperarousal state for so long. When this happens

the body plunges into hypoarousal, which can look like shutting down and dissociating. The body can get stuck in this ‘off’ mode, which may look like disconnection, depression, lack of energy, and numbness. We may find it difficult to motivate ourselves, and want to sleep all the time. It impacts our appetite and digestion and may make it difficult to feel any emotion at all.

Physiologically, our bodies are wired from a young age to react in a way that tries to protect us, but from the outside this can be interpreted as threatening, dangerous, hyperactive or self-harming behaviour. When we are interfered with by the police, we are denied the actions that would normally keep us safe in that moment, like running away, or fighting. The nervous system would usually dispel the excess energy created in a fight/flight/freeze state to bring us back into a space of calm. This is called the arousal curve. However in instances of state repression the nervous system gets left ‘on’. This is violent. It is inhumane. When I was eventually taken for a mental health assessment, and it was abundantly clear on leaving the cell that what was most detrimental to my mental health was not me, it was that room. I was not able to dispel any excess energy from this arousal curve. Just the act of being able to walk out of the cell and down the corridor was enough for my breathing to regulate and my heart beat slow down.

Additionally, we are interviewed and questioned when in the fight/flight/freeze mode. We can experience brain fog, reactivity, misinterpretations etc, which only serves the police state, and does not serve us.

It can take a long time to recover from instances of state repression, and requires an incredible amount of strength, tenacity, and support to bring yourself back into a place where you can engage with the world. For anyone who has experienced state repression or state violence, I love you. I recently came across a quote from Nakita Valerio that said “shouting self care at people who actually need community care is how we fail people”, and I couldn’t agree more. As someone who continues to overcome her adversities, it is not something that I could ever do alone. Trauma does not exist in isolation, it is an interpersonal phenomenon. Find community, reach out if you can. Local Herbal Mutual Aid groups are a great place to start.

## **Healing and holding the nervous system through adaptogens and nervines**

The amygdala in our brain acts as a watchdog, constantly searching for threat and danger. Sometimes the amygdala becomes oversensitive, and we have to teach it (and ourselves) what is dangerous and what isn’t. This becomes a



process of biofeedback, where the body and brain work synergistically. Typically in a trauma response, the amygdala senses danger (external or internal via thoughts) and switches the sympathetic nervous system on (fight, flight, freeze). What nervines and adaptogens do is support the functioning of the adrenal and nervous systems so they are not so reactive. Slowly, with love, attention and support, you can regain control over this automatic response. I find loving words of affirmation in these moments really help me, alongside emotional freedom technique (EFT) tapping.

### **Herbs for the nervous system**

I would like to introduce three nervines, plants that work with the nervous system, which can be drunk as a tea. I recommend working with a herbal blend for a period of 30 days, in this way you will get to know the plant, and get to witness how it works with you.

When sourcing herbs buy organic if possible, but use what is available to you. Medicine should be, and is free. It is all around us.

Important tea brewing tip! Boil the herb in a saucepan with a lid on. The volatile oils in the tea evaporate so you want to capture that goodness and bring it back into your tea. Every tea should be boiled for at least five mins so that the water has time to extract the botanical constituents.

#### **Oat Straw, *Avena Sativa***

This is the ultimate soothing and nourishing nerve tea. It is excellent to use as a base to blend with other teas. Oat straw when picked fresh emits a milky white substance. It's this substance that coats nerve endings. It is good for people who feel that they are 'on edge' or 'burnt out'. Its restorative action works on the nerve cells as well as the brain, so has a particular affinity for those whose stress comes from overthinking. It contains high levels of zinc, iron and manganese. This is a vitality tea, Make this tea your best friend.

Parts of the plant to use: Young shoots

#### **Chamomile, *Matricaria Recutita***

This is a widely used herb for a reason. This is a sedative nerve used for its relaxing properties. It is a brilliant herb for the nervous system, encouraging deep relaxation and tension relief. It is used for headaches, inflammation, muscle aches and spasms. Due to its anti-spasmodic, anti-inflammatory and

carminative properties chamomile works well for those who suffer with digestive complaints that are exacerbated by stress. I really encourage you to tune in to your body when you have had a cup of chamomile tea. What do you notice?

Parts of the plant to use: Flowers

### **Linden,** *Tilia Cordata*

The Lime Tree or Linden Trees line the streets of Bristol. They are everywhere. This is a tree native to the UK that produces a flower in early June. This exquisite little flower is another sedative nervine, bringing us deep relaxation. It is an anxiolytic herb, which means that it works well with anxious states, heart palpitations, racing thoughts , and headaches.

Parts of the plant to use: Flowers

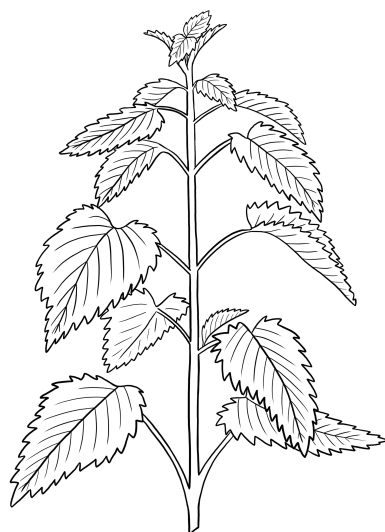
### **Adaptogens**

I see adaptogens as allies. Adaptogens should be present daily in your life. Develop a relationship with them, the body will learn to trust them and overtime begins to work in harmony.

### **Nettle Seed,** *Urtica Dioica*

Nettle seeds are one of our native adaptogens! Nettle seeds are fortifying, they combat fatigue and adrenal exhaustion, bringing us back into balance. Nettle seeds are an ideal addition to the diet and work best if eaten daily. These can be eaten, sprinkled on everything, baked, or you can make energy balls from them. The Herb Society UK has a nettle seed energy ball recipe that is delicious!

Herbalist Monica Wilde has an excellent article on Nettle Seed on the Napiers website. Check it out! Nettle seeds are also easily forageable, don't forget gloves!



*Nettle*

### **Ashwagandha,** *Withania somnifera*

This is an ayurvedic herb from India. Ashwagandha is a very grounding and restorative herb, which is great for those of us who are flighty or spend a lot of

time in the brain. Ashwagandha has been shown to regulate healthy cortisol rhythm by working on the hypothalamus pituitary adrenal axis (so the brain and body axis). It works on many systems within the body, including the immune system and cardiovascular system, so would be helpful for those who are run down from stress. Gaia Herbs has a brilliant article on Ashwagandha on their website.

### **Tulsi or Holy Basil, *Ocimum sanctum***

This is one of my all time favourite herbs. I love the taste of it, and it was the first adaptogen I was introduced to. I consider Tulsi my best friend. Tulsi has this incredible energy, it is a bit like being in the presence of a sage. It feels incredibly wise, and when I drink it I feel like I am being enveloped in a sphere of total acceptance. It's in this space that I have the capacity to completely relax, and through this relaxation my bodily systems can return to homeostasis. It feels fortifying and balancing. I notice that I have a lot of mental energy once I have drunk it, so it may have an affinity with the crown chakra, which allows me to speak my truth from a place of power. Tulsi addresses physical, chemical and psychological stress. It has been found to protect organs and tissues from industrial pollutants and heavy metals, and psychologically has anxiolytic and antidepressant properties. It truly is a beautiful herb.

*Elsie Harp is a mental health and folk medicine practitioner based in Bristol, UK. Elsie is a daughter of Apartheid, born to a Black South African mother and White West Country father. She recognised early on that the story living through her was not hers, and sought to liberate herself from the traumas of her lineage. Through work on the physical, emotional and spiritual planes Elsie continues to explore how the past affects her present, working with a deep reverence and respect for gifts that her ancestors and spirit guides offer to her in this lifetime. Elsie has written a zine on Racism, Intergenerational Trauma and Herbal Medicine - 'Healing Through Collective Change - a Herbal Zine for the 2020 Shift', which can be found on her website. She can be found at [www.divinabotanica.com](http://www.divinabotanica.com) or @divinabotanica on Instagram.*

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# PART 5:

# BORDER VIOLENCE

## INTRODUCTION TO BORDER VIOLENCE

This is a brief introduction to border violence and please bear in mind that developments continue at a radical pace as the state and corporations develop the infrastructures of control and oppression. Like other chapters introducing the state and state violence, it's worth noting before we start that nation states, borders as we understand them now, are also relatively new in human history - a mere few hundred years old. They are a phenomenon largely drawn by colonisers which emerged from systems of land enclosure, private property, capitalism and colonialism. They have always been a form of extraction of resources and the displacement of people.

### What are borders?

Reece Jones, author of *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, writes that:

*“Borders are not natural divisions between people or benign lines on a map. They are mechanisms for some groups of people to claim land, resources, and people, while fundamentally excluding other people from access to those places. They create and exacerbate inequalities and they protect the economic, political, and cultural privileges that have accrued over the past few hundred years through the spoils of colonialism, capitalism, and most recently economic globalization. Drawing a border is an inherently violent act that relies on the threat of force to support a territorial claim”<sup>1</sup>.*

We may each have a different relationship to borders. For me, being born in Wales and having a British passport, gaining access to most countries is relatively easy due to the privilege I gain from the massive colonial power and violence of the British state. It's always very surreal driving back from Calais after a week with our clinic knowing that I can just flash my passport at the checkpoint while others might drown trying to cross the channel.

Ray Acheson, describes modern iterations of borders in *Abolishing State Violence*:

*“...The borders of our nation-states make it hard to breathe. They dispossess and displace. Whether lines on maps, or systems of walls and checkpoints, borders separate people physically, socially, politically, economically. They demarcate lines of privilege and oppression. They are*

*mechanisms of extraction, exclusion, and exploitation. They determine fates of countless human beings based on random geographic location— based on where you were born, how much money you have, if you can get a passport, if you can get a visa, if you can afford to travel, if you are allowed to travel, if you can find work, if you can get asylum. These conditions are based on historic and ongoing acts of physical and structural violence, starting with colonialism.”<sup>2</sup>.*

### **Borders are open - for capital**

Before I dive into more detail about the ‘border regime’ and the violence against people on the move. It is worth noting that borders are in fact open - for capital. Jones writes:

*“However, rulers and states are not seeking to prevent movement completely. Quite the opposite: they rely on the movement of goods and services to produce the wealth that sustains their power. Their opening up is evident in the proliferation of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements, the global trade rules established at the World Trade Organization, and the creation of free trade zones in countries around the world. These changes allow corporations to establish factories in the cheapest places possible with minimal tax obligations and reduced environmental and labor regulations, which are critical to the functioning of the capitalist economic system and the maintenance of wealth.”<sup>3</sup>*

The exploitation of migrant labour has always been essential to sustaining capitalist economies. Big business commonly lobbies for greater freedom of movement because it enables them to more easily exploit the migrant labour they need to keep their businesses going. Many big business associations were actually anti-Brexit for example. As Gracie Mae Bradley and Luke de Noronha write in *Against Borders*, prior to the introduction of immigration controls, the labour needs of these settler colonies had been served by transatlantic slavery, indenture and transportation<sup>4</sup>.

Likewise, borders are open for the rich whose investment in a country will nearly always guarantee visa access. In Greece, for example, they have a ‘Golden visa’ scheme where an investment of €250,000 into property gets you a residence visa (and therefore access to the European Union via the Schengen Agreement). Freedom of movement therefore is generally a form of class oppression against the world’s poor (who were made poor through state violence, capitalism and colonialism). It is also extremely racialised.

### **The Border Regime**

Border violence is not just at the physical border hotspots themselves, such

as Calais. The ‘border regime’ (explained below) is everywhere. As Bradley and de Noronha write:

*“...Borders do not materialise only at the edges of national territory, in airports, or at border walls. In fact, borders are everyday and everywhere, determining how people relate to partners, employers and the police where they live and work, and their access to healthcare and welfare support.”*<sup>5</sup>

While I was undertaking my clinical herbalist training, I worked part-time for a workers co-operative called Corporate Watch. During my time there, we published a book called *The UK Border Regime* which is free to download (link in the resources section). This book gives an in depth introduction to understanding how the border regime works in a UK context, with detailed research into the companies and actors involved.

The border regime is a name for the overall system that tries to control people’s ability to move and live, depending on our immigration status. In the book, we used the term as a shorthand to mean all of the many different institutions, people, systems and processes involved in trying to control migrants

<sup>6</sup>.

These systems may include, but are not limited to:

- The reporting systems
- The dispersal systems
- The systems of raids and the work of the Immigration Enforcement raid squads
- The immigration detention system
- Deportations: the ‘removal’ system
- Investment in Calais, the port town in France where many people try to cross. The British state invest millions in fencing, policing and other systems to make it as hostile as possible
- The Hostile Environment: the many anti-migrant measures introduced under Theresa May’s hostile environment approach that continue to expand
- Hostile data: systems the Home Office uses to track people with its current databases

The border regime involves a number of actors, again including but not limited to:

- The Home Office: the main government department responsible for immigration control
- The Border Force: responsible for control at the ‘frontiers’
- Airlines, ferry companies, coach and train companies, Eurotunnel, port authorities, lorry companies, travel agents, who all work closely with the Border Force in different ways
- Security companies who run outsourced border searches, detention centres, or deportation ‘escorting’
- IT geeks developing new Big Data software, engineers inventing new surveillance systems and weapons
- Big business organisations lobbying to keep down labour costs
- Bosses who call Immigration Enforcement raids on workers demanding higher wages
- Media moguls spreading anti-migrant propaganda to sell papers
- Ambitious politicians posturing as tough guys
- Far-right agitators trying to ‘push the window’ of acceptable hate
- Council and homelessness charity workers going out on joint patrols with Immigration Enforcement to find foreign workers or rough-sleepers

A key part of the book is that the border regime cannot exist without our consent. It talks about the many everyday actions that people take which contribute knowingly or unknowingly to the border regime - whether that’s the GP receptionist ticking a box on a form without knowing the consequences, or someone calling a line to snitch on a person they suspect has no papers. The border regime continues to spin its ugly web, with increasing repressive legislation, violence and racist and xenophobic rhetoric in the media.

### **Drivers of migration and the creation and criminalisation of ‘migrants’**

There are many words and definitions attributed to people on the move. Through their Language Matters campaign, a group called the Migrant Rights Network based in the UK have been highlighting the ways in which the media and others talk about migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

They define an asylum seeker as:



*“an individual who has been forcibly displaced from their home country, because of war or conflict, settler-colonialism, or because they have been harmed or threatened with harm due to their ethnicity, religious or political beliefs, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation. An asylum seeker often has very limited rights in the country they have arrived in. Asylum seekers may seek formal, official protection from the country they have arrived in. Otherwise, they may live outside the remit of the law, fearing apprehension by the Home Office, and forced removal.”*<sup>7</sup>

Importantly, they reject the word ‘illegal’ to describe undocumented migrants, articulating that it is dehumanising, immoral, inaccurate, and contributes to the demonisation of migrant communities<sup>8</sup>.

Bradley and de Noronha in *Against Borders* write how *“the violent exclusion of people defined as migrants, which then makes it possible to illegalise, detain and deport them, should be of concern wherever it emerges”*<sup>9</sup>. Even being singularly defined as a refugee can feel dehumanising to many. People have multiple identities beyond the statist characterisation of why they have crossed a border.

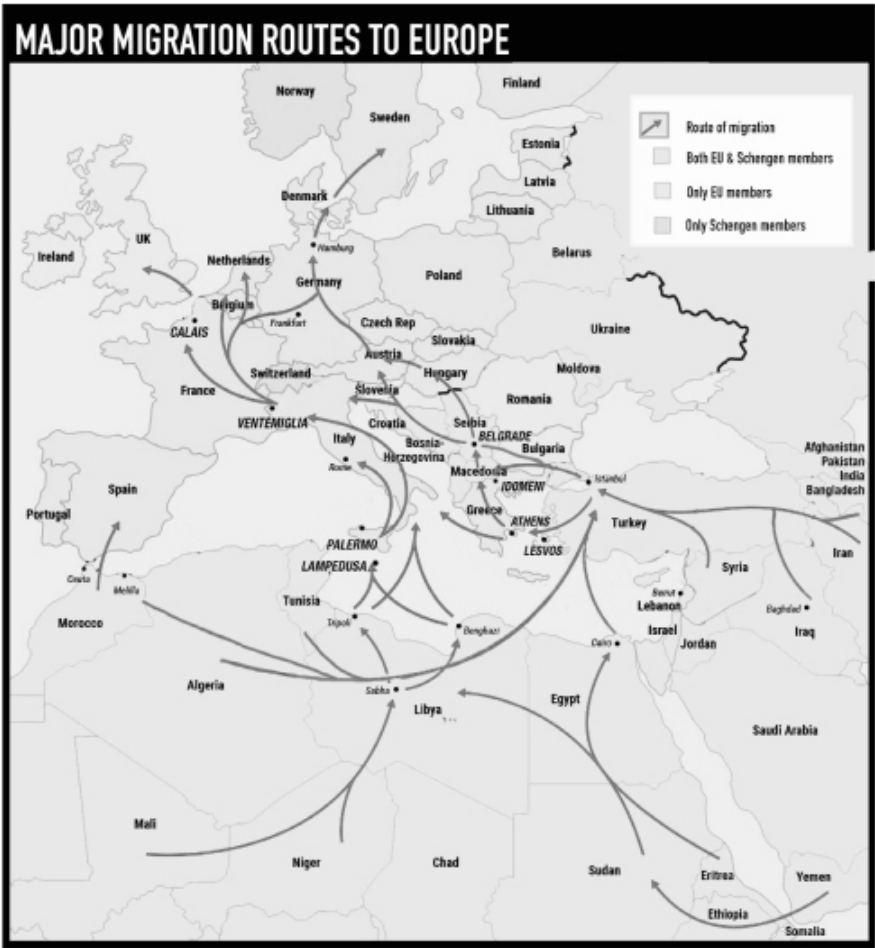
There are many reasons why people need to move. It may be fleeing torture or it may be economically desperation or a desire to re-unite with family. Achenson writes how the brutal impacts of colonialism, capitalism, climate change, and conflict work in tandem to create vast numbers of people on the move<sup>10</sup>.

Bradley and de Noronha go on to state, *“the modern world was formed through colonialism, and so the nation-states and global inequalities that define the world today cannot be disentangled from race and racism.”*<sup>11</sup>

Racism is a central tenet of the border regime and it is being worsened by the rise in nationalist and right-wing governments across Europe. In their extensive interrogation of borders and explorations of border abolition, Bradley and de Noronha speak to how *“we would be better off thinking about race, not as a biological fact or a phenotypical marker, but as a system of classification for the management of populations at the global scale, which can draw on biological or cultural referents (and usually both)”*<sup>12</sup>. They suggest that instances of ethnic violence and genocide can be best explained in terms of violent struggles over who is included in the nation and who must be expunged.

The political ‘othering’ of migrants, of who is defined as ‘illegal’ and must be ‘removed’ transcends racial distinctions. For example, the majority of detainees held over recent years in British Immigration Removal Centres are Black and Brown, many of them nationals of the UK’s former colonies; and yet, the top

three nationalities deported from the UK have been Romanian, Albanian and Polish since 2016.<sup>13</sup> The wheels of the border regime spin for all kinds of people classed as non-citizens. However, it's still worth naming that the violence experienced by people on the move is overwhelmingly fuelled by racism, systematically through policy making and overtly through the beatings of the police and border guards. I will speak more to anti-Blackness in the section on Calais.



### Border violence and the European Union

This map shows the major migration routes through Europe<sup>14</sup>. Each country tells a different tale of challenges, oppression and violence. One of the first

challenges is the initial death trap of trying to cross the Mediterranean sea only to face deadly pushbacks from Coast Guards, or to drown at sea. As I write this in December 2023, more than sixty people have drowned off the coast of Libya. The twenty-five people who survived were taken to a detention centre<sup>15</sup>.

The Central Mediterranean is the deadliest known migration route in the world, with more than 17,000 deaths and disappearances recorded by the Missing Migrants Project since 2014<sup>16</sup>. To even be able to attempt to cross the sea, people have to make dangerous journeys across deserts including in Libya where they are vulnerable to exploitation and enslavement. In my time in Calais, I have met a number of people who have disclosed being taken as slaves and tortured with machetes and other instruments, risking their lives to escape and continue their long journeys through Europe.

There have been many deaths in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean routes too. People working on boats running search and rescue operations are commonly criminalised in their attempts to save people's lives who have been ignored by coast guards.

The impression that many have is that we have freedom of movement in Europe due to the Schengen Agreement (a zone where 27 European countries "abolished their internal borders for the free and unrestricted movement of people"). However, national borders still very much exist, whether that is passport checking and control on trains or at checkpoints, or states stepping up their own internal border policing especially through the Covid-19 pandemic. Europe's borders are policed by its own Border and Coast Guard Agency called Frontex. Acheson writes:

*"This global battlescape of border security is part of the effort of wealthy Western governments to work together to make sure that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have as difficult a time as possible entering their countries or even making it to their shores."*<sup>17</sup>

People face extreme challenges moving through different states of 'Fortress Europe'. Whether that's residing in massive refugee camps in Greece with unsanitary conditions, or being beaten and stripped naked and pushed back across the border by border guards and police in Hungary. Risks of arrest and detention are common in nearly every state.

Pushbacks are the informal expulsion (without due process) of individuals or groups to another country. This commonly involves the violent removal of people across a border. The border regime has been compared to a dystopian

game of snakes and ladders, with people spending years managing to cross to places successfully only to face arrest and deportation to a different state and have to start over again.

I've met many people in Calais whose lives have been dominated by these kinds of unrelenting patterns. One man I met told me he'd lived the "refugee life" for more than six years and having finally made it to France was completely exhausted, spending the majority of his twenties escaping the police, hiding in vehicles, living in awful camps and conditions. He'd just had his glasses smashed by police that morning as I took him to the opticians to get him a new pair so he could actually see. I wish he was the exception to the rule, but people's stories echo similar across Europe.

One migration route not on the map is the more recent development of people crossing from Belarus into Poland. This is an interesting example of the weaponisation of migration. The Belarusian dictatorship encouraged mass migration into Belarus with a promise of access to 'Europe'. People were then faced with horrendous environmental conditions, of freezing winter and snow in one of Poland's *primaeval* forests. Despite criminalisation by the Polish state and the many risks for people involved, groups like the No Borders Team in Poland organised fast and responsive solidarity efforts, mutual aid and survival necessities for people on the move in the region. Comrades there tell me there is no way of knowing how many people have died in the forest from hyperthermia and it's often not until the snow melts that bodies of people are found.

The level of violence across Europe that people face is impossible to summarise. As Jones says:

*"The European migration crisis demonstrates the structural violence of the global border regime, as the hardening of borders and the closing down of migration routes makes movement extremely dangerous for the majority of the people in the world."*<sup>18</sup>

## **Dispatches from Calais - state violence on the British-French Border**

In this next section, I wanted to go into more depth about Calais because I am hoping that people reading this book may be called to come and volunteer with the Mobile Herbal Clinic and our work in France, and I understand that the distribution of this book is dominated by distribution in the UK and ultimately this is 'our border', our backdoor so to speak.

People from all over the world are scattered across the coastline of Northern

France with the intention of crossing the border to the UK. There are various encampments around the port locations of Calais and Dunkirk. British law necessitates illegal entry to the UK for almost all those who want to claim asylum. This means people are risking their lives to cross – via boats across the Channel or by climbing in and under lorries. Many people have died and countless others have been injured in this process.

It's worth noting that not everyone in the refugee camps in Calais is attempting to cross to the UK, many people are trying to gain asylum in France or move to other northern European countries. Because of violence from the French state as a failing to provide accommodation to people seeking asylum, people are forced to live in camps in Calais. There are also many people living rough in Paris facing regular beatings from French police while they await their asylum claims.

People we commonly meet are making dangerous journeys from Kurdistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Palestine, Pakistan, Chad, Iraq, Albania, Senegal, Libya and Ethiopia, and other countries. Many are children and young adults.

Calais Migrant Solidarity are a consistent crew that have been organising solidarity in Calais since 2009. Their website shares an overview of the situation on the ground that I have shortened to share here:

*“A fundamental component of the state’s attack on daily life has been the constant denial of shelter. This was done by refusing to provide sanctioned sleeping spaces; alongside the invasion, eviction and destruction of any autonomous living places that people created. The ability to live in Calais becoming a point of struggle for migrant communities, alongside the daily attempts to subvert the physical border.*

*Over time, people have made their homes all over the city in disused buildings, or squatted camps known as ‘jungles’ – from ‘dzhangal’, the Pashto word for forest, both inside and on the outskirts of the city...*

*However violence and arrest in Calais has never just been confined to living spaces. It is a daily reality that people face both while attempting to cross the border, but also whilst going about other aspects of daily life. The train stations, parks and just the street are places where people have been repeatedly targeted for ID checks (‘controls’), violence and arrests. As well as constant surveillance and intimidation at the places where people go to eat at the different food distribution places there have been in Calais over the years.*

*The violence faced by people trying to cross the border is the constant that never changes in Calais. People are beaten, caught by dogs, gassed – by pepper spray or more serious gas – and*

*routinely threatened and humiliated. And this is all alongside other injuries or dangers that people face while making attempts to cross the border. While violence in public places and living spaces has fluctuated over the years, the police have never shied away from violence in these places where often nobody is watching, where nobody is filming*

*The police are not the only people who contribute to this policy of violence, repression or discrimination in Calais. The way the UK border operates and the fines imposed on truck drivers found with migrants inside means that violence at the hands of lorry drivers whilst crossing is also a significant risk.*

*... Uncountable lives are wasted and suffer from the violence of the border. Whether from the direct attacks by police and border forces, or in the attempt to escape their controls, or through the dangerous methods of transit, or at the hands of gang-masters and mafia, an unthinkable number of people have died in Calais. Alongside the increased security measures over the last couple of years, the number of people being killed whilst attempting to cross in more and more dangerous ways has increased. These people are always in our thoughts.*

*Many times over the last years, these tactics of deterrence from Calais have been met with resistance and defiance. Demonstrations, occupations and resisting evictions have been common place over the years. Most importantly, people have always kept coming to Calais, always carrying on crossing the border and finding ways and places to live while they are here.”<sup>19</sup>*

Calais Migrant Solidarity paints a picture of the reality on the ground. It’s very hard to communicate this reality without spending time in Calais and Dunkirk and sometimes when I share anecdotes, people stare at me in disbelief. I talk about the situation in Calais further in terms of healthcare in our interview about the Mobile Herbal Clinic in this part of the book (Herbal solidarity in practice: The Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais).

Another aspect of Calais are the clear expressions of anti-Blackness. Christina Bush writes how:

*“...anti-Blackness refers to the specific forms of racism contingent upon or cast through the denigration, disenfranchisement, and disavowal of people racialized as Black (and their attendant cultural practices and production). Additionally, anti-blackness is a term that attempts to more accurately name particular types of racist attitudes and practices that are levied against Black people specifically, which can potentially become attenuated through broader terms like racism, or subsumed and obfuscated by popular framings like People of Color (POC).”<sup>20</sup>*

Anti-Blackness is very evident in Calais. While violent evictions take place against all groups living in Calais and Dunkirk, it is clear that Black communities face relentless police brutality. As one example of this, in April 2020, an open

letter was published by the Eritrean community of the ‘Calais jungle’ reporting escalating police brutality.

It describes the actions of the CRS police (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité); the general guard of the French police, infamous for riot control and repression:

*“They don’t see us as human beings. They insult us with names such as monkey, bitch etc. And for the past few weeks, they have started to threaten our lives by beating us as soon as the opportunity arises. When for example they found a group of two or three people walking towards the food distribution, or in our tents, when we were sleeping. They accelerate in their vehicles while driving in our direction, as if they wanted to crush us. They also took people with them to places far from Calais, and beat them until they lost consciousness.”<sup>21</sup>*

The statement continues with a chronological list of events whereby people were beaten up, hit, gassed, had their arms broken, and were struck on the head so hard they lost consciousness and were taken to hospital by ambulance.

Before moving on to other elements of the border regime, I want to emphasise here that the camps in Calais are not only sites of violence and oppression. I am inspired every time I work there with the clinic. We meet people who show so much solidarity for ‘their brothers’ and each other - from the person who stays with us to translate for hours on end, to watching people accompany each other to hospital so their friends are not alone. There is so much friendship, care and mutual aid as well as defiance and resistance to the border regime. People share with us their dreams and hopes for life in the UK (which can sometimes be depressing because people underestimate the conditions) but there is often an atmosphere of hope and sometimes even excitement.

People aren’t just ‘victims’. Folks have agency and autonomy and vast amounts of courage and persistence. Yes this is due to violence and oppression outside their control imposed on them, but it’s still moving to witness. It’s hard to express. Meeting thousands of people moving through Calais over the last four years, it feels impossible to summarise or even capture a handful of the conversations or experiences with people and the depth of people’s experiences. See the resources section for links to projects such as Conversations from Calais and the Calais Border Broadcast that share people’s voices directly.

## **The Mexico-US Border**

Much like each of these sections, the violence of the border regime at the

Mexico-US Border would make up realms of books in itself. Jones writes:

*“Unfortunately, direct violence, including killings by the Border Patrol, does not even scratch the surface of the structural violence that surrounds the US–Mexico border. The Border Patrol has recovered more than 6,000 bodies along the US–Mexico border since the 1990s, deaths attributable to the construction of the border wall and the massive Border Patrol presence. Migrants are funneled to more dangerous and remote locations, just like migrants at the edges of the EU. Instead of crossing in a city, migrants are making the arduous journey through the deserts of Arizona, which requires hiking for fifty or more kilometers through arid and desolate terrain”*<sup>22</sup>

The Mexico-US border gives us an understanding of the direction most border policing is taking around the world and it illuminates the increasing militarisation of borders. As Jones writes,

*“The historic distinction between the internal and external roles of the police and military has blurred, and the border is a key site where the emerging security state is visible and where privileges are maintained by restricting movement through violence.”*<sup>23</sup>

Worldwide, we are seeing the rapid growth of technology being weaponised, and an ever-increasing development of surveillance technologies and biometrics, as well as drones and the construction of both physical border walls and ‘virtual’ border fencing. DNA samples have also been collected from people in immigration detention in the US since 2020 creating a disturbing ‘genetic panopticon’<sup>24</sup>.

## **Detention Centres**

Detention Centres are a cornerstone of most border regimes. Arresting and imprisoning people for their migration status is a common practice worldwide and is one aspect of the prison industrial complex (explored in the introduction to prisons section of this book). Like all prisons, detention centres harm and traumatise people with the same patterns of coercive control and captivity that I describe in the ‘healing from incarceration’ article. As Acheson describes:

*“If people survive the deserts, seas, bullets, and beatings, and manage to make it to a country of possible refuge, many are then arrested and incarcerated—sometimes for days, sometimes for years. The conditions in detention centers from Australia to the United States are like concentration camps due to the overwhelming violence, abuse, and degradation.”*<sup>25</sup>



As of 2018, in the UK alone, around 2,000 people are locked up without trial or time limit in the Home Office's immigration detention centres<sup>26</sup>.

The book *UK Border Regime* I mentioned earlier states:

*"In theory, immigration detention is meant to be a short term measure while people are 'processed' for deportation. In practice, only half of people detained are actually "removed". The other half are held for weeks, months, or even years before being released again, often into the limbo of the reporting system. Indeed, the UK is the only European country with indefinite detention."*<sup>27</sup>

People in detention do not take their captivity lightly - many people resist with demonstrations, sabotage and strikes, as well as inside-outside organising. People also resist with the agency they have left - to end their own lives. In the UK, we've seen many people killed by detention due to suicide because of the distress caused by oppressive conditions.

There is an increasing trend towards offshore detention centres, with a recent battle against the British state's plans to send people to Rwanda. The most infamous offshore detention system in the world has to be that used by Australia, whereby asylum seekers arriving by boat were sent to Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea for detention (thankfully this is no longer occurring in the same way due to public pressure and years of struggle by detainees). This includes children travelling by boat and those born in detention. Many horror stories emerged from the centres, including devastating revelations of child abuse by guards in 2016 through leaked documents<sup>28</sup>.

## Deportations

*"For some, the journey ends with a deportation flight out of the UK: either handcuffed by private security "escorts", or pressured to accept "voluntary return". The Home Office departs over 12,000 people each year in "enforced returns. Over 20,000 more are officially pushed into so-called voluntary departure."*<sup>29</sup>

The majority of deportations take place on standard scheduled flights, like the 2010 British Airways flight on which Jimmy Mubenga was killed by three G4S guards in the back seats of the plane. But perhaps the most brutal face of the UK border regime is the practice of mass deportation charter flights. Up to 2,000 people a year are loaded onto these secretive night flights, which may leave from Stansted airport or from smaller airports and military bases. Often shackled in 'waist restraint belts' or 'leg restraints', deportees are manhandled

by private security ‘escorts’ onto aircraft hired from charter companies such as Titan Airways.<sup>30</sup>

In the US the deportation machine is in full effect. According to the *World Population Review*:

*“Between 2003 and 2018, 4,617,463 foreign nationals were deported from the United States. 2012 and 2009 saw the highest number of deportation with 407,821 and 401,501 deportations respectively. Unsurprisingly, some of the states with the highest deportation rates have the highest immigrant populations in the U.S. and are known as immigration hubs.”*<sup>31</sup>

## **Raids**

Raids are a critical part of the state violence of the border regime. Again, from the *UK Border Regime* book: *“First come dawn raids against residential addresses, to catch people while they’re still sleeping. Later, the squads hit restaurants, shops and factories in “illegal working” raids: there are around 6,000 of these a year, arresting around 5,000 people. Or they join up with police and others in multi-agency operations against public transport, rough sleepers, street markets, and other targets.”*<sup>32</sup>

ICE raids are a common tactic in the US too as well as many other countries.

## **Dispersal and Asylum Accommodation**

Another feature of the border regime are the many people living in a legal limbo sometimes for years on end.

*“Around 80,000 people queue up regularly at 13 reporting centres spread across the UK. These people, who include asylum seekers, have few rights, and always the threat of detention and deportation hanging over them. At the same time, thousands of asylum seekers waiting for their claims to be processed are warehoused into squalid accommodation, scattered in “dispersal areas” around the poorest parts of the country. This housing is run by companies including G4S and Serco, who also run detention centres. But other migrants, including many refugees whose claims have been refused, are unluckier still: banned from working, but cut off from all official support and cast into destitution.”* (*The UK Border Regime*, 2018)<sup>33</sup>

Since the book was published, there has also been an increase in the number of people forced to live in hotels as other housing isn’t provided. A very sinister recent development has been the employment of Bibby Stockholm - a prison-esque giant floating barge currently docked off the coast of Portland, Dorset. The barge, which can hold up to five hundred people in small cabins, has a menacing presence and within weeks of opening, a deadly strain of legionella bacteria

was found on board meaning people had to be evacuated<sup>34</sup>. Campaigners are fighting for the dehumanising accommodation to be abandoned. People are also housed in poor conditions in former military barracks.

### **Access to healthcare**

Examples of state violence against people on the move are endless.

As many people reading this book are likely to be interested in herbalism and healthcare, I wanted to briefly touch on access to healthcare in a UK context for people without papers. The group Patients Not Passports have been campaigning around the NHS charging scheme for a long time. They describe the impact of charging on people's access to healthcare:

*“The Immigration Act 2014, which came into force in 2015, saw the expansion of pre-existing charging regulations for ‘overseas visitors’ using the NHS. This included broadening the group of people who are chargeable, introducing an ‘immigration health surcharge’ for those seeking visas to enter the UK, and up to 150% charge for treatment in secondary care at the discretion of NHS Trusts.*

*In October 2017, these regulations were once again expanded. Now, charging has been introduced into some community services, NHS Trusts have a duty to check the eligibility of all patients before providing treatment in secondary care, and, for certain treatments, patients may be asked to pay upfront or risk being turned away.*

*Where does charging occur? Charging occurs in secondary care, including hospitals and community services provided by both NHS and non-NHS funded providers. Most primary care, including accessing a GP is still free for everyone. Treatment in A&E, urgent care centres, and walk in centres is also still free.*

*These regulations undermine the key founding principle of the NHS: free care based on need, not financial ability. It is often the most vulnerable patients, some of whom are destitute, who are receiving bills of tens of thousands of pounds, or being denied care because they are unable to pay upfront. Worryingly, some people who require treatment are too frightened to seek it due to the cost and the possible impact on their immigration status.”<sup>35</sup>*

Access to quality healthcare is a challenge for people on the move wherever they are, whether that's in a refugee camp with a scabies outbreak, or dealing with a fractured wrist in a forest in Belarus. In many locations, with access to hospitals comes the threat of arrest, detention and deportation. Other healthcare services often require state registration of some kind. Even if there is free access to healthcare without the need to show documents (like in France) many people

will not know it is available or will not trust that it will not bring them into interaction with the state in a threatening way.

For all these reasons, grassroots healthcare projects have a role to play in creating alternatives to the state and offering accessible care for people on the move. I hope people will be inspired to create projects like this after reading this book.

## **Border abolition**

Taking inspiration from struggles for prison abolition, border abolition requires similar levels of political imagination and struggle. As Bradley and de Noronha write:

*“Abolition is concerned with presence (the presence of life-sustaining goods, services and practices of care) as well as absence (of violent state practices like detention and deportation). Accordingly, border abolition seeks to dismantle violent borders, but also to cultivate new ways of caring for one another, nurturing forms of collectivity more conducive to human flourishing than the nation-states we currently inhabit. Border abolition is a revolutionary politics situated within wider struggles for economic justice, racial equality and sustainable ecologies, based on the conviction that there will be no liveable futures in which borders between political communities are violently guarded.”*<sup>36</sup>

Struggles against the border regime include resistance and fights against new developments, such as the British state wanting to deport people to Rwanda. It also includes mutual aid and survival based solidarity such as distributing food and things people need, operating search and rescue missions on dangerous seas, organising health care and many other examples. It also means organising as a collective struggle - working with and being led by people on the move who resist repression, organise demonstrations and fight back. We can keep taking action to resist dehumanisation and advocate for free movement of people.

*“The abolition of borders requires that we challenge all the social structures underpinning their permanence. This means transforming the wider set of social and international relations that converge around bordering, as well as ending and dismantling the most visible manifestations of borders: towering walls, detention centres, mass deportation flights.”* (Bradley and de Noronha, 2022).<sup>37</sup>

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## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* THE MOBILE HERBAL CLINIC CALAIS

The Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais is a dedicated mobile clinic that takes place the first week of each month in Calais and Dunkirk in Northern France. The clinic offers preventative medicine, self-care support, first aid and healthcare access support to hundreds of refugee people and undocumented migrants living in the region. Since October 2019, we have seen more than 10,000 people with upper respiratory conditions, skin complaints, digestive issues and more, as well as injuries from police violence. Our medicines are made by a dedicated network of grassroots medicine makers and growers.

Below is an interview between myself and Victor Paes, a herbalist and one of the Field Coordinators of the project alongside myself. The transcript has been edited to make it easier to read in this format. You can listen to the audio version of the podcast on the *Frontline Herbalism* podcast at: <https://solidarityapothecary.org/the-frontline-herbalism-podcast/40-msdn-10-mobile-herbal-clinic-for-refugees-in-calais-and-dunkirk/>

**Nicole:** Hi, Victor. I know we're like besties, and we've been doing the project a really long time together, but for people who don't know you, please, can you introduce yourself, your pronouns and like any political affinities or projects you'd like to include that you do.

**Victor:** My name is Victor (he/him). I'm a herbalist, also known as East End Herbalist, and I'm based in London, and I've been practising herbal medicine for about four years since I graduated from the University of Westminster. I'm also a field coordinator at the Mobile Herbal Clinic, and I've been going to Calais with them since 2019. For those who don't know the mobile herbal clinic formerly known as Herbalists Without Borders Calais is a mobile clinic that takes place in Northern France, in Calais and Dunkirk, and we'll be talking more about it. And I also help to facilitate some of the nature walks organised by Misery, which is a mental health collective centred around healing for queer, trans, non binary, melanated, Global Majority folks. here in London. Our herb

# MOBILE HERBAL CLINIC



العيادة المتنقلة للتداوي بالأعشاب  
**CALAIS & DUNKERQUE**

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walks take place on the first Saturdays of every month and Misery also does sober parties and events as well. I have worked with the International Solidarity Movement in the past, supporting Palestinian farmers during the olive harvest. International presence means that these farmers are less likely to suffer violence in the hands of the Israeli occupation forces and the illegal settlers. So, yes, that's me.

**Nicole:** Amazing. Thank you for being here. So, for people who are not aware about the situation in Calais and Dunkirk. I call it like a border hotspot of people trying to get to the UK, but can you just share a little bit of background of what's the situation and the context for people living in France?

**Victor:** Sure. Yeah, well, the infamous 'Calais jungle' was a temporary home for I think over more than 7000 people at some point. There were loads of makeshift mosques, shops and other infrastructure. It was really like a small village. But then that was cleared and demolished in 2016. And since then, the refugee people have moved and have been living scattered in and around Calais and Dunkirk. And there are loads of challenges that they face there, like mainly I'd say state repression and the hostile environment that comes from that. Obviously there are weekly violent evictions almost daily that are conducted by the French police. They use tear gas and pepper spray. They will be beating up people, confiscating and destroying property, including mobile phones and other items. We actually saw a patient who had their prescription glasses destroyed by the cops, they literally threw the specs on the ground and stepped on them and the man was without his glasses and couldn't see anything.

Yeah, I mean, this is not to mention obviously like human trafficking, with women and children being the most vulnerable there. It's pretty bad. Yeah, and it's like groups of people that are trying to cross to England for safety by boat,

by trucks and by any means that they can. We know from experience of meeting families who've then died in the channel that it's extremely dangerous trying to cross by boat. And then people are often criminalised and put in prison accused of being traffickers. People are also risking their lives trying to get into trucks and engines and all sorts of things.

**Nicole:** What are the living conditions where the camps are, like where the clinic is working? What are people eating? Where are they sleeping? What's their kind of general access to healthcare?

**Victor:** Yeah, I mean, just living. Conditions are basically inhumane. Not even pets or animals would live in that condition, you know, but yeah, people live in tents. Also like if you've been to the area, you know that the climate is a bit wild. And by wild, I mean like rain and wind, like that destroys tents, makes places turn into mud baths. And that makes everything worse. Of course. Also, there are many agencies obviously doing amazing work, but life is really super precarious there in the camps, obviously like access to clean water, showers, clothes, and food is somewhat limited. And if you add relentless police violence and intimidation on top of that, you have a real pressure cooker about to explode at any minute.

**Nicole:** Where are most people coming from? Like, that's a question we always get asked.

**Victor:** Yeah, I mean, like it is from places like war zones and places that are really affected by wars, really, conflicts. So we've got loads of people from Afghanistan. We have people from Syria.

We have a lot of Kurds from Iraq, from Iran, from Turkey. And we also have lots of Sudanese and people from East Africa. So Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia. And obviously like Sudan at the moment, we've got like a massive influx of people from Sudan. Some Albanian people are trying to reach the UK as well.

I mean, it changes, right? Like every time we go, there's like somehow different patterns of people. But I think, yeah, most people are on the move, seeking asylum in the UK and have had really intense kinds of journeys throughout Europe, experiencing violence on all sorts of borders.



**Nicole:** What is the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais? When did it start and what do you do or what do we do?

**Victor:** So yeah, like I said before the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais is a mobile clinic that takes place, in northern France, in Calais and Dunkirk. And we offer acute herbal medicine, first aid, self care support and healthcare access support, which means we take people to hospital when it's needed. And we started officially in October, 2019, and we have been trying to go there every month since. We normally do the first week of the month because that's when the Red Cross, which is the other medical agency operating there, has their week off.

**Nicole:** And what sort of kind of health conditions are you commonly responding to? What do we see in the clinic?

**Victor:** Obviously that varies depending on the season. Winter being the worst time, needless to say, you know, the cold, the wet damp weather leads to a lot of respiratory infections. So that is rampant during that time. So we see lots of coughs, you know, upper respiratory tract infections. So coughs, cold, sore throats, sinusitis. In the summertime. We obviously have allergies, hay fever, rhinitis and all that kind of thing. We also see lots of digestive issues. Obviously, like a lot of people there, they are eating foods that are not really culturally appropriate. So, you know they'll suffer from different kinds of indigestion, acid reflux, diarrhoea, constipation. And also especially during the warmer months especially summertime, we see loads of skin conditions. So scabies, fungal infections, itchy lesions and bites and things.

And obviously musculoskeletal system problems from police beating people



*The Mobile Clinic set up*



*A former encampment in Calais*

up, people falling off trucks, accidents. So there's a lot of musculoskeletal issues. And what else we do see, obviously, wounds, burns and, you know, topical things. Obviously, you're living with those conditions there.

Also, foot care. We do loads of foot care there. You know, especially in the winter, it's cold. People wearing the footwear, they can't really take them off because obviously it's cold. They're sleeping outside so that can lead to problems. We see lots of trench foot, horrible cases of trench foot, especially in the winter and headaches due to stress, lack of drinking water. There's obviously dental problems as well. It's always like a huge variety of health conditions that people are presenting with.

**Nicole:** I think a big question we get asked is kind of like, what is the role of herbal medicine? Like within all this, like what makes the mobile herbal clinic different to other types of clinic and what kind of medicines are we using?

**Victor:** Yeah. Well, just before I answer that question I think it's worth mentioning that not less than 80 percent of people worldwide rely on herbal medicine as part of their primary health care, and especially South America, Africa, and Asia.

Having said that, it does make me happy when I see patients familiar with the smell and taste of our medicines. So yeah, herbal medicine will be familiar to a lot of people there in the camps. Also, it's reassuring when we hear that refugees have been asking other medical agencies, Red Cross or Medicine du Monde for, for our medicines. That's really reassuring. By the way, on our last trip a member of the FAST team called us. FAST is the First Aid Support Team, a team of first aid volunteers that have also worked in Calais a long time. One of the members called us to say that one refugee was asking for our bruise ointment for his sciatic pain. And that's one of the wonders of herbal medicine, which is that one medicine can be used for more than one condition, like our bruise ointment, that can also be used for nerve pain, sciatica and old fractures.

So regarding the medicines we carry in our dispensary; we have medicines for respiratory conditions. So we've got cough syrups, immune tonic, chest rubs, salt water for blocked noses. We also have medicines for digestive conditions such as our delicious indigestion lozenges. We've got clay powders. We also have as I said, bruise ointments, musculoskeletal creams, wound sprays, anti fungal creams.

**Nicole:** What would you include in a pack for someone that had just a kind of basic cold, like they'd been sick for a couple of days, like nothing too serious?

**Victor:** Yes. As I said, we've got our cough syrup, which is really soothing. The immune tonic as general immune and antimicrobial support. We also have chest rub and saltwater. I think that will be like the skeleton of our colds and flu pack.

**Nicole:** Yeah. Amazing. And I know that we were both involved at the time, but at the beginning of the pandemic, we made like 6,000 medicines and distributed them in about 1500 packs.

**Victor:** Obviously at the start of the pandemic, people didn't know what we were dealing with, but we knew what kind of antiviral support would be helpful and support for people with sore throats and things. I shall add as well that obviously like herbalists in the UK, we tend to use tinctures a lot, but we had to obviously do some adjustments because of the demographics we see there. So instead of, for example, alcohol, we use glycerine and vinegars. And yes, and we have a wonderful medicine making team in the UK doing that for us, which is great. Yeah, that's really worth naming, actually, that most of the medicines we produce ourselves, an amazing herbalist called Louise Wall coordinates the medicine making and a bunch of different herbalists everywhere to produce things that we take.

**Nicole:** Medicine making was definitely a big role that I had, which I'm trying to step back from, but yeah, in terms of the team and how it works, we know that generally we have a doctor as part of the team if possible. And that we refer people to local hospital infrastructure. But I just wondered, like, what's the project's relationship to kind of like allopathic medicine or like other healthcare agencies in the region?

**Victor:** We luckily have a couple of French GPs working with us. And that really helps when we have to take people to hospitals or to the clinic and advocate for them to be seen. I personally believe that the future of medicine is integrative medicine. Therefore, allopathic medicine definitely has a place there. You know, sometimes herbs can take a while to have an effect and certain acute

conditions would require something more fast acting. Therefore, we would refer these patients to other medical agencies or to take themselves to the local clinic or a hospital, depending on the condition.

And also it's very important that we understand our limitations and be humble about what we do and also we have a great relationship with the other medical agencies on the ground, such as the Red Cross, Medicine du Monde, No Borders Medic and the FAST Team. They respect what we do and in my experience, they will not hesitate in referring their patients to us as well. So it is really nice to be working alongside these other agencies and we kind of, you know, they're supporting each other in a way and being there for each other and obviously for the refugee people that we see, our patients.

**Nicole:** Yeah, for sure. How do you think the refugees living in France, how do they feel about herbal medicine? Like I know you mentioned it before about people asking other groups for our medicines, but what has been your kind of general impression in the clinic about how people are responding to what we're offering?

**Victor:** Yeah. Well, like I said, 80 percent of the people worldwide still rely on herbal medicine as part of their primary health care. So, yes, people do respond well to our medicines. We strive to make our internal medicines as tasty as possible. I mean, thank you glycerine for lending us all its sweetness without raising blood insulin. As I said, also our cough syrup is so delicious that you just want to eat them!. So yes, the response is great, I'd say. And our clinic is so busy from the start until we finish. I think we see an average of 80 to a hundred plus people per day.

And yeah, it's worth noting that we also have an external medicine station. So we're doing a lot of more generic first aid as well. Like we've got all the different dressings and bandages and things. So yeah, and we're, we're obviously using the medicines that we make as much as we can.

**Nicole:** How can people get involved in the clinic? What sort of support is needed right now?

**Victor:** Well, there are many ways people can get involved. You don't need to be a herbalist or in health care to be part of the mobile herbal clinic. As we



mentioned before, we do need lots of volunteers to help our herbalist Louise to make the medicines. You also don't need to be there in person. To be helping you could do parts that can be sent to Louise's farm and then we assemble everything in there to make the medicine so you could be making medicines remotely as well. We also need people to help us out with admin roles, like doing emails, fundraising etc. We obviously are always in desperate need for people to come and join us in the field, on the ground there who have medical and clinical experience. If you are unable to do any of these, you can always help us financially because we are always in need of funds. We don't have anyone at the moment that is supporting us financially. So we are relying on people that follow our work and, and, and appreciate what we do. It's literally been fundraising trip by trip the last few months.

**Nicole:** Is there anything else you'd like to share about the project?

**Victor:** Yeah, I mean, I'm very happy to see that it is probably the only project of its kind. I mean, working with herbal medicine in a context like that. So I think it's, I'm very proud and happy to see how far we came and, and we're still there. We're still going, you know, there were many moments where we thought, Oh my God, we're going to fall apart or that we're not going to have the capacity anymore, but we're still there. Thank you to all the support we've been getting and I'm very happy and excited for the future of the clinic and hopefully we can keep providing to the people there because obviously, you know, healthcare is something that everyone should have access to.

**Nicole:** Yeah, definitely. And that's why I really love the project as well in this context of medical self defence. We really learned at the beginning of the pandemic how much supply chains were affected for different things like

pharmaceutical medications and we were really able to kind of grow what we needed and make what we needed from our supplies. And I think it really builds in this resilience and autonomy. And like, I know when we're supporting refugees, like it's always about enabling autonomy for people. So we'll give them packs of dressings and a wound spray so that they can clean their own wounds. So they don't have to come to us, for example.

Or like things like cough syrup and stuff, it does enable someone to take care of themselves. Like as long as they know where they can go to hospital, if they don't get any better, then, then we've kind of safeguarded. But yeah we've had so many chats over the years about, you know, apocalypse situations and like herbal medicine and like I know we're both a little bit kind of like prepper-esque but I just wondered like what your feelings were in terms of herbal medicine in this like bigger context around community self defence or maybe you could even mention Misery again of like what does this kind of look like in terms of us all like surviving and hopefully ending capitalism?

**Victor:** Yeah well I mean herbal medicine is essentially the People's medicine. I think being able to reconnect to it is just amazing. As I said before, I believe that integrative medicine is the future. So, you know, get all these different branches of healthcare practice together, like osteopathy, herbal medicine, acupuncture, you know, allopathic medicine, all of that, but yeah herbal medicine is us because we are nature, right? We tend to see 'us' as kind of separated from nature, but we are nature.

## Resources

1. The Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais website: <https://mobileherbalclinic.org/>
2. Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/mobileherbalclinic\\_calais/](https://www.instagram.com/mobileherbalclinic_calais/)
3. Victor's website – East End Herbalist: <https://www.eastendherbalist.com/>

## ORGANISING A MOBILE CLINIC: TOP TIPS

Lots of people contact me with visions of doing similar clinics to the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais and it fills me with joy. The thought of projects like ours being propagated around the world is amazing because I do think that what we've offered to refugees and people on the move in Calais is definitely applicable to other kinds of border hotspots. The refugees are always talking to us about how horrific it's been for them, especially in Belarus, the Balkans and Greece, especially with experiencing the violence of pushbacks. We haven't had the capacity to expand beyond France, but I would really love it if this section of the book inspires people to start their own mobile clinic. I have done some training with people on the Italian-French border who are interested. If anyone reads this and is in need of more support, please don't hesitate to reach out.

The first thing to note is that this is not a small project. It is generally a long-term thing with very serious infrastructure. Medical responsibility is not always the easiest thing for grassroots, informal organising. It needs a lot of structure and care and intention, to be successful and to actually meet people's needs. This piece contains 'top tips' for people considering a similar project.

### **Surveying needs**

From a design perspective, I think any project should start with a survey to really identify what the needs of people are, including their health needs, the common presenting conditions and so on. In Calais, we're seeing people who are sometimes living outdoors for as much as one to two years, whereas somewhere like Serbia, they might be literally passing through for a couple of days or weeks. In Belarus/Poland they might have particular issues to that area, for example, frostbite, or they may have infected bites and wounds because of the particular microbiology of that area.

Every border hotspot has a different relationship to medical access. So in France, people without papers are able to access the free clinic and the hospital, but I know in other countries there's not always a right to access health care. I know in Poland and the Belarus border when people go to hospital, they become extremely vulnerable to deportation. So taking someone to hospital in that

context is often a matter of weighing up if their life is in danger and if it's worth the risk of potentially being deported. In Calais on the other hand, we're able to refer people to hospital without as much risk of arrest, for example, if they need to change their wound dressings or to access medicines such as antibiotics. It's important to have a really intimate understanding of people's needs.

### **Relationship ecology**

Another important consideration is what I call relationship ecology - getting to know the other grassroots groups on the ground. Even if you want to do something medical or herbal medicine related, it can be worth spending as much time as you can volunteering with a group that's distributing food or clothes or doing human rights documentation work. That will give you a massive advantage as you'll be building relationships with those existing groups on the ground. You will have a better understanding of how things work, and you'll know who to refer to.

You might end up working with groups that you don't necessarily have political affinity with. It might be a much larger NGO that has a relationship with the state, or a contract with a detention centre or something, but realistically, you're going to have to be calling in favours from different people. You might need that mainstream NGO giving out clothes because you've got six guys there with hypothermia that you need clothes for right now and you don't have the money to buy them.

I've seen teams come to Calais and see that it's very well resourced. There's us, the Red Cross, Médecins du Monde and the First Aid Support Team. In Dunkirk, there are the No Borders Medics. It's not every day of the week that you need a massive medical infrastructure and it's important not to assume what people need. You should check the numbers of people, their different health needs, the common languages spoken, and so on, so that you can provide the best care possible.

### **Cultural respect and anti-racist education**

It's important to get experience – and ideally training - organising solidarity with refugees. It's important to know how to communicate with people who speak a different language to you, for example. Cultural nuances can be critical. I've been going to Calais for four years and I'm still constantly learning the differences between the different groups of people. In the Eritrean camp, people



are super shy and might not come up to the clinic very easily. We'll sometimes stand there for hours before someone comes. On the other hand, many Kurdish people can be super assertive. In Dunkirk I know that I can stand there in the summer with my tattoos out and the Kurdish guys don't mind at all. But I know for the Sudanese guys, that's seen as culturally disrespectful, and I have to be completely covered up at all times (ideally). We need cultural respect and awareness to do this work well.

It's important to note that with these sorts of projects, people need constant anti-racist and political education. That might be missed if you're volunteering with a larger medical NGO, but we've seen volunteers coming out with different levels of awareness around how the border regime works. There can be racist dynamics. If you're white and you're going to be organising with people who are mostly BIPOC, then you need to be on it in terms of your own internalised racism, in terms of understanding how racism influences society, in terms of how it influences access to healthcare. Collective self-education in your project is important, whether that's a monthly workshop, or sharing reading lists or just informally chatting with each other at every opportunity.

### **Know your limits**

If you're going to practise herbal medicine in a clinical context, then you seriously need to know your own scope of practice. You need to recognise where your training ends and you need to know what your relationship is to other forms of healthcare.

Who has clinical seniority in your project? We always have a clinical supervisor, and it's often someone with ten or more years of medical experience, ideally a GP. We have a few different GPs on our roster, and we also have medical herbalists with twenty, thirty years experience in different settings. It's really important to have these experienced people to safeguard our team and make sure we're not making serious clinical mistakes. If you're doing a grassroots project that doesn't involve diagnosing people - distributing cold and flu packs on the street, for example - then that's a different thing. But still then, how can you be sure that the person that you've given a cold pack to has a simple cold and not pneumonia?

There are also different rules around practising medicine in different countries. Sometimes herbal medicine is illegal and that might influence how you have to practise. So for us, it's really important to have a French GP on hand because that means we can get approval from the prefecture, so we can work

without getting disrupted by the police. And that context will differ depending from country to country. If you're going to be practising herbalism illegally, which is something that I'm not against people doing, please be really smart about it. Think about the language you use, think about how you label your products, think about the training and the bureaucracy needed. The last thing you'd want to do is invest thousands of pounds in developing an amazing project that can't function because it's been criminalised.

Consider the relationship of your project with other medical practitioners. Are you just going to work with herbalists or are you going to work with doctors, paramedics, or nurses?

What's your relationship with certain medications? In Calais, we obviously can't prescribe things like antibiotics, but we can take refugees to local clinics to access them, and our French doctor can prescribe them. Without that support, we would have to really think about the limit of what we can give someone. A huge part of our work is support to access healthcare. If I meet a refugee who is an insulin dependent diabetic, I'm not going to arrogantly assume I can help manage their blood sugar with herbs, I'm going to get them to hospital, get a regular prescription set up and a fridge and everything else so that they can get what they need.

We need to leave any dogmatism around herbalism at the door, because we can't monitor someone's wound consistently. We don't have the kind of surveillance that you might need with a viral infection. If I get Covid-19, I can monitor it, I can take herbs regularly and I know when to call the doctor if I'm not getting better. But if you're seeing someone once in a clinic, you don't have that safety net.

We have to consider what we're giving them and whether it's giving them the impression that they've got the treatment they need. That in itself can be very dangerous. They need to understand the limitations of the treatment that they're receiving. We give flu packs to people if they've just had a cough or a cold for up to seven days, but for every single pack we distribute we make sure that the person walks away with an information leaflet of where to go if they don't get better. I don't want anyone receiving our herbs thinking they've had treatment and then developing pneumonia two weeks later.

So a good relationship to different medical services can be hugely important. Know where the hospitals and the clinics are. Maybe you know some other healthcare professionals that will see people, outside of a hospital setting, for example. I know on the Polish border with Belarus, there are certain doctors

that work under the radar to support people because of the deportation risk of visiting a hospital with a police presence.

### **Learning and sustainability**

The other element is that ideally you'd be able to go and learn from a project and apprentice with them. I know that's not always possible with herbal medicine because there's not many grassroots herbal projects, although we wish there were more. But for example, with our mobile herbal clinic, people are welcome to come with enough notice and see how we work in the field, see our medicines, see what we do in practice. If you're able to go out with another project doing similar things, then you'll save yourself a lot of time and energy.

Like most projects, I always recommend that people start small and grow sustainably. It's important not to get too top heavy or grow so fast that people burn out. Start with gentle goals and move from there.

We've developed a number of systems and structures that are important to how we function as a clinic in the field, this includes the opportunities for debriefs and feedback.

I know some groups, for example, that are active in the Kurdish freedom movement or Kurdish solidarity work have a technique they've used in the movement for a long time called Tekmil, which is basically when group members are able to criticise each other. You can give feedback to someone in a structured way during a meeting specifically focused on feedback. You can say 'actually today you made a sexist comment, and it really upset me', and then that person is not invited to respond to that, they have to just kind of sit with it and reflect. You might give feedback to an individual or the whole group. You might say, 'I was really struggling today, and no one noticed, and I actually just needed someone to check in with me.'

This is just one movement tool people use to develop stronger groups. We can design inter-collective mechanisms where there is a culture of giving feedback to people. Our clinic team has a debrief every single morning. We will not leave the house without that debrief, even if it means less time in the field. We've noticed on days where that structure collapses a bit, for example, if someone loses their passport, and they have to drive somewhere, and they miss the meeting (all kinds of things happen), it means that they haven't had a chance to offload, or receive feedback or raise concerns they have. Also they haven't had a chance to get positive feedback. I love working with new volunteers, telling them, "Hey

you did really great. That guy absolutely loved how you cleaned their feet, and you were really respectful.” We can forget that when we’re students, those little compliments can be really helpful.

For us having this debrief structure is absolutely essential. I take notes so that we can then give feedback to the whole of the project. So we know, for example, okay we didn’t respond to this gunshot wound very well and we need to do scenario training in our group.

Another issue is burnout. Encouraging people to even just talk about burnout, to think about it, to read books on it, to read articles on it to integrate that into your training, into your induction training, is really important.

### **Funding and legal structure**

I recommend that people think about things like funding from the start. Our trips to Calais cost about two and a half thousand pounds per month and that’s quite a challenging amount of money for a very grassroots group. Be aware of how much things cost and where you can get supplies donated. Think about your supply chains in terms of herbal medicine and other medical supplies.

And think about your legal structure. I think for us, we wouldn’t have been able to create a legal structure and then start doing our work. We needed to learn what worked first before deciding on a legal structure. But I also wish we’d been able to advance that process a bit sooner. There are a lot of liabilities and a lot of risk on the shoulders of volunteers. So having the right structure is really important both in terms of funding and also just in terms of legal protections.

We’re registered as a community interest company which means we can still politically organise, and we can also trade. We can sell medicine and merchandise, things like that, but we can also get grant funding. The not for profit industrial complex (see glossary) is a real thing, and that funding is very precarious and problematic but ultimately a project like this needs as many resources as possible.

I can tell you in advance that most funders do not want to fund herbal medicine projects. I can’t think of any funders that specifically support herbal medicine and herbal medicine is super marginalised in that respect. We’ve had funding but it’s very limited compared to more mainstream health projects. We’ve had grants from a herbal medicine company, Planta Medica, who sustained us for two years.

It might be best to just set up a mobile clinic that’s more generic and not

mention the herbal medicine side (but still practise it) as a way of attracting funding. As herbalists we have to recognise the main people that are going to be supporting us are going to be other herbalists who want to see herbal medicine in practice. They're the people often donating to our crowdfunders, for example.

We've been heavily dependent on crowdfunding. Sometimes those are ongoing crowdfunders and sometimes they are specific. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we launched a Covid-19 response crowdfunder, which funded 6,000 medicines going out in 1,500 flu packs.

We had a crowdfunder for when my van got smashed up by fascists in France, which was very specific. I've found that crowdfunding is most effective for very short, specific time-urgent things. We are trying to move towards a model of monthly donations for sustainability. We've also been very dependent on selling merchandise - screen-printed t-shirts, hoodies, aprons, tea towels - and that's been very effective.

We try to limit our costs as much as possible by asking companies to donate products. We've had things like heat packs and magnesium spray donated. We try to get gloves, hand sanitiser, all the first aid disposables, donated as much as possible. And I think that is probably achievable wherever you are in the world.

There are definitely other projects that have much lower output than us. Bristol Herbalists Without Borders, for example, have a budget of around £10,000 a year which would only cover about four months of our project. They pretty much cover all the costs with one fundraiser a year - they produce a calendar, or a book, and sell it to their support base that they've spent a lot of time and energy building up over the years. And, bang, they've got enough money for the whole year for all their medicine making ingredients, and they can just focus on what they do best.

Ultimately when there's a goal and a vision, we can sometimes fundraise to meet that goal. And sometimes resources are really limited, and we do what you can with what we have. In Calais, if we couldn't afford to do a mobile clinic, maybe we could afford to do workshops at some of the women's houses, where we'd make creams with people, products for babies, things like that. You may be limited by resources available and that is a totally understandable and common challenge.

### **Division of labour**

Also think about sustainability in terms of paid and unpaid labour. Our

project rested on unpaid labour for several years and I think that drove a lot of us to quite intense burnout. It reproduced massive dynamics around class and gender, and we often ended up with the working-class femme doing all the unpaid labour in a very unsustainable, ‘martyr-y’ way (I’m a classic example of this).

It’s important to really reflect on the concentration of labour and the hierarchies in your projects. I’ve definitely been responsible for co-creating dynamics in which I do vast amounts of the work and haven’t delegated well. I can then feel unsupported by the team while the team simultaneously takes me for granted and becomes dependent on my work. I’ve seen this pattern in my collectives and it always seems like a challenge to confront.

Always think about who’s carrying the work, who’s carrying the responsibility. Bear in mind aspects of class, gender, race, age, all the different forms of socialisation of who ends up doing most of the work.

It’s really easy to reproduce all of these things in grassroots groups without a lot of energy and attention being paid to how we structure ourselves.

Now we’ve introduced a stipend system in which our clinical supervisor and our field coordinator both get £400 per trip (depending on funding available). Given all the actual amount of work involved, before, during and after a seven-day trip, that still comes out at a tiny hourly rate. But still it takes the edge off the financial impact caused by doing a whole week’s worth of unpaid labour (as well as several weeks of preparation work). We’ve never been in a financial position to have better salaries than that and I think it would be ideally something we work towards. Keep payment in mind. Consider the division of labour, who’s doing what and who’s getting paid. I think this is a critical part of creating a sustainable project.

### **Medicine making logistics**

For medicine making, logistics is really important. Think about what your supply chains are and who is making the medicine. If it’s the same team as the people doing the clinical work, then that’s also a recipe for burnout. I really learned that myself from just doing so much medicine making. I love it, and it’s a massive source of joy, but to spend three weeks making medicine for a one-week trip just meant that I was getting no rest.

I think we can also recognise that medicine making is something that is much more accessible than clinical work. Of course you have to be good at it and

have confidence in the quality of your medicines, but it's something that can be shared and taught to volunteers. Not everyone can do frontline work - people with chronic illnesses, people with caring responsibilities - there's so many people who can't travel and do a mobile clinic. So medicine making is a fantastic way to get all sorts of people involved in a project.

I recommend standardising your recipes. We tried really hard to be open and adaptive so that we could change with the seasons and use what's available, but we've just learned it's just so much easier logistically to have one standard recipe that everyone uses.

### **Training and skill sharing**

Think about skill sharing: How will you integrate training in your projects? How will you train new volunteers who are working in the field in a clinical setting? How will you train volunteers to make medicine? How is that structured?

I've found that actually charging people for training is quite effective. We did a herbal foot care training that lots of people paid to come to (although we didn't turn anyone away who couldn't afford it), and they knew that their contribution was funding the project. Training itself can be an income stream.

### **Vicarious trauma**

I also think people need to think about the well-being of volunteers in terms of vicarious trauma. In Calais, we've worked with families in the clinic who've then drowned in the channel the week after. We've listened to harrowing stories of trauma and torture and we've responded to gunshot wounds. It's very traumatic stuff to interact with, but we don't really have any formal infrastructure for dealing with that, other than the kind of informal friendships and emotional care that we give each other.

Think about emotional labour as well. How are you debriefing? We have a debrief every single morning in Calais to reflect on the day before. We check in about everyone's well-being and how they slept, and we also reflect clinically and practically on things we could have done differently. Consider how you will integrate debriefs and learning and people being able to express their distress with what they've seen.

In Calais there's a collective of counsellors and therapists that offer free support to volunteers, so you can signpost someone to them if they're particularly struggling. They've noticed that volunteers that are working there

long-term, three, six months, even a year, will start to show signs of trauma. Their mood changes, they might develop some physical health problems. They might develop depression or have an altered nervous system state, and that's often because they're super overwhelmed over a very long period. As herbalists, we try to support them as well.

I think everyone should be aware of the warning signs. Sometimes the most vulnerable people are those who have been doing the work for a long time. They've been burnt out before, they understand the nervous system, but they're such responsibility magnets. Again, I include myself here. We're almost not aware of our own limits because we're so used to our limits being pushed all the time that it's completely normalised. And also, as a field coordinator in France, I'm so concerned with the welfare of the volunteers that I'm often not thinking about myself. I'm not thinking, "how did that feel responding to that gunshot wound?" I'm thinking, "oh god, how's that new person coping? This is their first time they've ever been here".

Counsellors have supervision, and I think everyone in every project should have someone that they can go to as well. Thankfully, more seasoned organisers often have that, informally, with friends and comrades, but we can't take it for granted. Just because someone is experienced in a movement, we can't assume that they have that infrastructure.

In terms of group dynamics, structure can be liberating. We need regular meetings booked in, we need to rotate who's the facilitator, who's taking notes, and so on, because without that structure, people just disappear into black holes and get burnt out and don't want to come back. They often can't communicate to the rest of the project the reasons that they found it difficult.

I think it can be helpful to choose someone in your project who has good interpersonal skills to be the person on the trip who's got their eye on the team. Obviously that's very difficult if they're also doing a role with a lot of clinical or logistical responsibility, but if there's someone else with less of that, then their role can be to notice if someone isn't sleeping well or if they need a walk before bed to talk about how they're feeling.

Unfortunately, that person is commonly femme-socialised or has some sort of experience of emotional labour. It's important to recognise that it's a form of labour that is draining in itself. So many times I've gone to Calais and I've been more tired from supporting the emotional needs of volunteers than I have attending to four hundred refugees and their injuries.

It's amazing how much energy it can take to actually support someone who's



struggling.

Another aspect is screening, including having calls with people before they come. I have said no to several people because my first interactions with them gave me the impression that actually they're in a really vulnerable place and I don't think working in a refugee camp with loads of violence is going to do them any good at all.

I want to know what their intentions are, how resourced they are emotionally, how mature they are and what their life experience is. We don't really take young volunteers (and generally most people get into herbal medicine when they're older). We want people who are at least fairly autonomous, resourced and emotionally intelligent so that they can articulate their needs and take breaks and communicate their boundaries. Otherwise, it is dangerous taking people into the field who are hyper vigilant or hyper aroused. That environment is just going to be hellish for them.

### **Translation infrastructure**

This is always a challenging area if you're working with people who don't share a first language. In Calais we regularly interact with ten or more languages a day, depending on where we're working. Sometimes there will be someone, a refugee in the community who can translate for "their brothers" (as they affectionately call each other), and they stand with us all day long. They never want payment or anything, they're just amazing. They just see it as their act of solidarity to help us translate.

Other days we don't have someone like that, and we're dependent on tools like Google Translate or various apps. Other times we've had people within the team who speak multiple languages, and that can be extremely useful but we're never going to have a translator who can translate for every single language. We needed other systems. We have a system now in which we have a WhatsApp group for each language. We just text in the group and ask if anyone is free, we call the first person who replies, and we do simultaneous translation on the phone. We put them on loudspeaker, and they can talk to the refugee and then they translate to us in English. It's fast and efficient. It means that people in other places can support people in France and it also means that we don't have to recruit/transport/host translators and we can focus on clinical skills.

If you have people within your team who speak a language or two, then that's amazing, but they can often end up in a translation role, when actually

they need to be doing wound dressings, for example. It can be very frustrating for volunteers who are herbalists, who have a second language, like Farsi or Pashto or Arabic, because they want to be doing clinical work, and they end up just being constant translators. So consider your team's needs and preferences too.

## **Social media**

Social media is a big part of our world these days. If you're doing a project, I really encourage you to think about your social media guidelines in advance so that you're not reproducing offensive, oppressive dynamics and that you're not, for example, revealing people's identities without their consent. The language you use around migration and trauma and asylum seekers makes a big difference and I think it's important to determine which language you're going to use and why. It's something to politically explore together.

## **Exploring your motivations**

The kind of projects I think work best are those that organise ongoing, consistent solidarity, where people are constantly reflecting on their roles while also being engaged in political organising. So for example in Calais, we go to demonstrations if we have time during the week. We share reposts and blog posts about fighting things like the deportations to Rwanda. We see ourselves as part of a movement that is resisting the border regime.

I think that's very different to groups where people are volunteering because of their own sense of ego or white guilt or something. It's very important to interrogate your reasons for doing something. Is it tokenistic, something heroic to put on your CV or are you dedicated to being in struggle with people?

## **Adaptable structures**

In terms of infrastructure, it's also helpful to create systems that other people can use. I've put a lot of energy and intention into creating systems that a different field coordinator can pick up. I use an open-source database tool called Seatable, which is amazing. And I have a checklist of what needs to be done each month: booking the Eurotunnel, confirming volunteers, and so on. Having a list like this means that new field coordinators can pick up the project and run with it. They still need support, and they still text me regularly with questions when they are getting started, but we have tried really hard to create a role that

is replicable.

When you are starting your project, think about documenting your procedures and making things easy to use by different members of the team. It's a way to stop the labour becoming quite so concentrated. Of course at the beginning of the project, you can't write a whole operating manual if you haven't done anything yet. It's a case of tweaking systems as you go. Our inventory has expanded massively over the years so the medicines we use now are different to four years ago - everything changes - but having some kind of system is really important.

### **Other practical considerations**

We've been dependent on my private van for a really long time, and I've individually carried the cost of sustaining that vehicle, which has felt kind of unfair. Think about what a fair mileage exchange might look like so that vehicle owners can afford regular servicing of their vehicle. Or even consider a collective vehicle for the project if that's a possibility. Costs like insurance can be collectively fundraised. These are topics we could have thought about more in advance.

I get loads of questions from people about how we actually structure the clinic itself, where we store the herbs and so on. We've had so many different systems over the years, from plastic boxes to crates, and right now we've settled on having drawers. We have different stacks of drawers, well labelled with all our different medicines, and it makes it really easy to distribute the medicines. Drawers work really well for us! I'd strongly encourage them as a set-up for other mobile clinics.

Storage is also really important. Once again, we've had many systems over the years from volunteer garages to finally renting the corner of a warehouse. You will accumulate 'stuff' especially if you're receiving donations of items in bulk, so think strategically about where to store items, how they are organised and how accessible they are for the team working.

### **Risks**

Doing solidarity work in different areas of the world, people are at different risks of repression. In France, volunteers have been arrested (not in our team, but in other projects.) I had my van smashed up by fascists. The windscreen was smashed up really badly. Luckily, it was really early in the morning and we

weren't in it. You're going to have to consider that with increasing far right and fascist governments, there is always going to be hostility and racism towards refugees and people on the move, and that means hostility to volunteers and people doing solidarity work too. Think about the risks to your team, think about safety. Every team is different.

Paramedic services, for example, won't go into the camps in France. Even if someone has been shot, they won't go in. You have to carry that person who has been shot to the ambulance. Whereas our team does go into the camps directly and we do medical work in that context, but we have certain safety protocols. We always ensure that we all have our different phones on. We always have male team members because of the risks of sexual harassment. Think about risks.

I know that in other places, like the Poland-Belarus border, volunteers are so heavily criminalised that they are basically operating in an underground fashion. They have to communicate securely for example so that they're not picked up by the police.

## **Limits**

Set boundaries for yourself in terms of the focus and limits of your project. I want to do everything in Calais. I want to support people who are getting arrested, people who are coming off boats. I want to do shoreline support. I want to help cook food. If I could just clone myself, I'd be so happy to do all of these different tasks. But I know as someone who's invested fifteen years in learning about herbal medicine that I'm really effective in this clinical role.

We also know that we can't provide health care every day of the week in France. We can only come one week a month and that creates some real limits for us, which we just have to accept. We know that the clinic is not a campaigning group. We don't have the resources to read policy and lobby politicians but as individuals we are also active in different struggles. Know yourself, your limits and your specialisations and remember that you're just one part of this ecology of solidarity.

There are so many things that we haven't done that we would love to do. Even in the UK there's work we'd love to do with people who are housed in hotels, for example. There's so much need. I've sent 150 bottles of lavender oil to a Kurdish community association in Glasgow that they distributed. That barely cost me anything. You can make a difference even if it's on a small scale. It might be that there's already a clinic in your area working with refugees.

You could build a relationship with them, just donate them bruise ointment, or cough syrup. We give cough syrup and chest rub to different medical groups, because the refugees ask for it. They want it, they have the bottle from the last time, they need more.

Even if you yourself can't run a clinic, you might not have doctors, you might not have other people, and the resources, but you might have a relationship with someone who's open minded to herbal medicine, and you could offer to make 500 packs of de-stress tea – wild harvested, so it's free – and that can just then be distributed in the community centre or whatever. I think you can be creative, and you don't have to have an enormous full-time clinic. You can have much smaller herbal solidarity projects, whether it's just getting mixes to someone going through court or responding to an uprising or donating to herbal street medics. There are so many options.

I think being strategic, and content, and humble with what you're doing is really important.

### **Managing expectations**

I think people can have an inflated sense of the impact they can have. Medicine in general is notoriously sort of heroic – less for herbalism which is a bit more holistic and grounded - but I think, especially people from a more emergency care background, there is an element of wanting the sexy, exciting, heroic stuff. The gunshot wounds rather than just washing someone's feet and putting blister plasters on them. It isn't all glamorous.

People can come and not understand the complexities of all the drivers of the border regime, of racism, of why people are migrating. We have lots of narratives around refugees and then people don't know what to do when they meet a refugee who's sexist, who gropes your ass. They don't know how to make that fit with the racial bias in their head.

Sometimes people arrive with dehumanising, unrealistic expectations of a 'perfect refugee', with a trauma story, and a torture story, who has had a heroic journey across Europe. That might not match someone's expectations of the person who has just had a fight in the camp. I've seen people run in front of me trying to stab other people and that doesn't fit with this Western saviourist ideal of 'nice refugees that we want to integrate into our society.' A lot of volunteers come with a perception that everyone's a victim and everyone needs saving, and they don't see the complexities of oppression.

People also struggle when they meet a refugee who's talking to themselves or who's really displaying signs of psychosis, for example.

That might fit their worldview that refugees are really traumatised, but then they don't think about the refugee who's organised all the blankets for all the families that have just arrived and who's taking care of everyone. Once in Dunkirk, someone was getting chased and someone else was trying to stab them, and a whole group of Kurdish guys just circled our van to protect us. I wasn't expecting that, but you see constant care and solidarity and gentleness and affection between people. And sometimes that can almost be as surprising as someone who's super traumatised. People come with quite Western loaded worldviews of psychiatry, for example, that they apply on people. That can invisibilise people's resilience and solidarity and collective care.

I think people are sometimes shocked if they're disliked or not wanted. Our clinic is very, very, well appreciated by people.

We haven't had many negative interactions, but occasionally of course someone will say 'Oh, go back to England'. Sometimes they're so sick of seeing white volunteers offering them shit, that they're just sick of it. It's good to acknowledge that you're not always going to be wanted. You're not always going to get vast amounts of gratitude. Some people are lovely and are super grateful for stuff and are very kind, but it's not something we assume from every person.

I've spent time driving someone to hospital, sitting in A&E with them, and we've barely said two words to each other, because I'm just not trying to make that person have to talk to another white person and tell them their story.

They're not in the mood, I'm not in the mood, and it's fine, and we know that this relationship is transactional, in a way. We had a refugee we knew who lived in Calais for four years trying to cross and he said that what he loved about our project was that there was no expectation for interaction. He could come up and get a plaster and that's it. I'm not going to fill in your name and your refugee status and your language on a piece of paper or make you line up with a ticket and a number. Just tell me what you want, I'll give it to you, and you don't have to interact with me unless you want to.

People have come with racist worldviews that they've been called out on by the team. They might be very shocked when they meet a Black person who has been a doctor or knows just as much about medicine as they have or is a journalist, for example, and isn't a refugee. That includes volunteers who are people of colour. Often they're the most shocked because they might think they're going to be with their people somehow. And then actually, all day long,

they get asked where they're from and who smuggled them in. They get loads of racist comments and are exhausted.

Another challenging aspect is that it's all really horrible to actually just see that things aren't getting better. It's horrible to go back to Calais four years in a row and see that the police violence is just getting worse, that the evictions are getting more frequent, that many hospital staff are getting more racist every day. People are burning out and there's not as much food and volunteers as before. We hope that things are going to improve, and when they don't, that can be really hard for people to come to terms with. We can almost handle the suffering if it is a snapshot in time, but when it's so systematic and consistent, it's just a bit harder to get our heads around. We can start to feel that we're a cog in the machine and that we're not actually addressing the root causes of these conditions.

A lot of people do get burnt out from more 'service' roles, like cooking food and stuff, because they do want to just organise politically against the border regime and try and change, you know, policy on asylum and all sorts of stuff. I don't think it's one or the other, but I think if you're doing some sort of service role, you're going to know that that's a long term thing. Same if you're working on homelessness, for example – we'll be attending needs for as long as bloody capitalism exists. We need to have that long-term worldview.

People sometimes come in with super inflated ideas of herbal medicine. It's cringeworthy sometimes. Maybe they've read one blog by an American dude who did herbal first aid at a festival, who found a herb really effective and they assume that it's going to be effective for everyone. For myself, until I've seen a certain powder or wound spray work on fifty wounds in a row, I'm not going to talk about it with confidence that it's definitely going to work. We need to come in with a humble perspective on herbal medicine, build up our evidence base, build up our experience base and take everything we read on the internet and everything we've heard from any herbal teacher ever with a big pinch of salt. Otherwise it's just dangerous in my opinion.

People don't have enough training around dermatology for Black and Brown skin. We don't have enough training around tropical diseases or things that people are travelling with. We have a lot of kinds of clinical 'blind spots'.

We've also had the people that come once to put it on their CV, or on their website to gain social capital. Especially during the George Floyd uprising and Black Lives Matter movement, there was a big influx of people wanting to volunteer. And some of them lasted just as long as their black squares on

Instagram. Again I come back to the importance of a screening process. We might not even need to turn someone away. It might just be working through a reading list or an anti-racist workshop before they come. We can't assume people are going to be amazingly politically educated, and that's their starting point, because it never is. Having a cultural expectation that the team are all constantly learning all the time, is really important.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it's clear that starting a mobile clinic is no small task! There are so many considerations at play, from ensuring the team has the needed skills and medical knowledge, to how to build and sustain relationships with different groups and how to provide quality care in extremely challenging conditions. Yet the rewards are vast - I will never forget the moments of connection with people I've worked with and supported, whether that is someone telling me it's the first time someone has shown them care since they left their country, or it's finally getting a torture survivor the medication they need to help manage their pain.

The fact that we can develop a clinic where the majority of medicines are home-grown or sustainably foraged and made by networks of volunteers, means that this model can be repeated by grassroots groups in different regions. As climate change worsens, and colonialism and capitalism continue, the numbers of people on the move are only likely to increase. As state violence escalates and the border regime becomes increasingly militarised, solidarity will be more essential than ever. I can imagine a network of mobile clinics across Europe serving people at different border hotspots with high quality care, effective medicines and unwavering political solidarity. If anyone shares this vision, please get in touch and let's make it happen.



## *Remedies & Recipes*

### MOBILE HERBAL CLINIC CALAIS RECIPES

This section shares some of the recipes for the most commonly made medicines that we use with the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais. Please see the medicine making section for tips on making the base ingredients, like infused oils or glycerites. Please note, our recipes are constantly evolving. Many of these recipes have been originally developed by herbalist Melissa Ronaldson and we, as a project, express our appreciation for these. They have been built on and ‘tweaked’ over the years of operating the clinic and can often change due to seasonal availability of herbs.

If you are interested in getting practical experience in medicine making and supporting the medicine making efforts of the clinic specifically please email [medicine@mobileherbalclinic.org](mailto:medicine@mobileherbalclinic.org)

#### CALAIS COUGH SYRUP

This is a fantastic sugar-free and alcohol-free cough syrup that combines a strong glycerite with a marshmallow gloop that offers mucilaginous support to dry sore throats and coughs. It is sweet tasting and fantastic for children or people hesitant to take herbal medicine. The ingredients can be altered or essential oils may be added (in safe quantities) to make it clinically stronger. I often have five slow cookers on the go so I can make this cough syrup *en masse* for people we serve with the clinic. You may need to slightly tweak the quantities depending on the size of your slow cooker.

**Quantities:** Makes around 30 x 100ml bottles of cough syrup (increase or reduce to suit your needs)

#### **Warm glycerite**

- 2250ml Glycerine
- 750ml Water

- 250g Elderberries (*Sambucus Nigra*)
- 100g Fennel Seeds (*Foeniculum vulgare*)
- 100g Cinnamon sticks (*Cinnamomum cassia*)

### **Marshmallow Gloop**

- 100g Marshmallow powder (*Althaea officinalis*)
- 200ml Rose water
- 800ml Water (or Elecampane Decoction, *Inula helenium*)

### **Warm glycerite method**

- Combine the glycerine, water, elderberries, fennel seeds and cinnamon sticks in a slow cooker.
- Stir really well
- Put on slow cooker in intervals – heat up for an hour or so and then turn off to cool. Repeat. Leave overnight and continue. 48 hours of this process is ideal. Then strain.

### **Elecampane decoction**

- Add 50g of elecampane root to a pan with 800 ml of water
- Heat until boiling.
- Reduce heat and simmer for 20 mins.
- Allow to cool and strain.

### **Marshmallow gloop**

- Put marshmallow powder in a bowl. Slowly add the rosewater and warm water (or elecampane decoction), stirring as you go.
- ‘Beat’ the mix vigorously to dissolve the powder. You want a nice slimy gloop - add more powder as needed if too watery.
- Leave to sit overnight (ideally at least 12 hours)

### **Before bottling**

- 3 teaspoons of Vitamin C

### **What you need**

- Bowls
- Spoon
- Measuring jugs
- Muslin/straining cloth
- Slow cooker
- Stick blender
- Bottles

- Strain through muslin and squeeze out as much gloop as possible.

### Combine

- Combine the strained warm glycerite and marshmallow gloop in a bowl.
- Add vitamin C and blend with a stick blender. Bottle up!



## CALAIS CHEST RUBS

Chest rubs are an amazing resource for respiratory care. They are rubbed directly on the chest during a cough or cold, ideally several times a day when a person is acutely sick. They can also be applied on the neck, under the nose and even on the temples in some cases. They complement internal medicines such as cough syrup. An effective herbal chest rub contains ingredients that are antimicrobial and also stimulating to help shift a respiratory infection. We add lavender essential oil as it's also a relaxant and can aid sleep which is helpful for recovery.

Please note the volume of essential oils is different for chest rubs produced for children. See how to make the infused oils in the medicine making section.

### Ingredients

- Black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) infused oil 120ml
- Bay infused (*Laurus nobilis*) oil 200ml
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) infused oil 200ml
- Ivy (*Hedera helix*) infused oil 300ml
- Beeswax 100g (or vegan alternative such as Soy Wax)
- Essential oils:

- Eucalyptus smithii 10ml
- Foeniculum vulgare 10ml
- Camphor 5ml
- Pinus sylvestris 10ml
- Lavendula angustifolia 10ml

To tweak this recipe these are guidelines:

- Know your infused oil quantity
- Wax = 10% of infused oils
- Essential oils = 5% of infused oils + wax quantity

## Method

1. Measure out your infused oils, and put them together into a bowl or jug over a water bath, or the top of a double boiler.
2. Weigh out your wax, and add to the infused oils.
3. Heat gently while stirring, until the wax has melted.
4. Measure out your essential oils, and make sure all your pots are laid out with the lids off, ready for the hot ointment to be poured into.
5. Take the infused oil/wax mixture off the heat and add the essential oils, stirring well.
6. While the mixture is still hot, pour into pots. Leave to cool before putting the lids on.
7. Label pots



## IMMUNE TONIC

Immune tonic is a staple of the clinic in Calais. It's distributed to supplement the cough syrup for people with respiratory infections. We also give it to people who are clearly immune compromised, for example people with persistent wounds or infected bites. To be honest, it's helpful for nearly everyone we see because everyone is surviving extremely challenging living conditions. As you can see from the ingredients listed below, the mix of herbs are generally those that offer immune support, have strong antimicrobial actions and also some general nervine actions.

The recipe is very flexible:

- You can combine glycerites with vinegars for people avoiding alcohol (the majority of people we see with our clinic)
- You can also make a glycerite only mix for people unable to stomach vinegar (for example, people with acid reflux)
- You can also combine glycerites with alcohol tinctures for people able to consume alcohol. With Ukraine Herbal Solidarity, for example, we combined Echinacea Tincture (*Echinacea Purpurea*/*Echinacea angustifolia*) and Elderberry Tincture (*Sambucus nigra*), with warm-infused glycerites of Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) and Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) which was absolutely delicious and incredibly well-received/well tested amongst people on the frontlines and those leaving Ukraine.

Because we use so much immune tonic, our recipe has become flexible based on the time of year and which plants are available, as well as what we've been able to source from companies or volunteers contributing medicines.

To make 10 litres of Immune Tonic you will need:

- 7l (litres) glycerites
- 3l herb infused vinegar
- 5g/l citric acid (50g for a 10l batch) or vitamin C powder
- Large bucket
- Silicone stirrer
- 200ml flasks
- 1l beakers

See the medicine making section for how to make glycerites and vinegars.  
Examples of ingredients previously used:

### Glycerites previously used

- Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)
- Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra fruct.*)
- Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*)
- Hawthorn (*Crataegus spp.*)
- Cleavers (*Gallium aparine*)
- Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)



### Herbal vinegar ingredients previously used

- Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)
- Elderflower (*Sambucus nigra flos.*)
- Antimicrobial blend (see separate section)

### Method

1. Choose which glycerites and vinegars to use.
2. Measure the quantities.
3. Place the vinegar in the bucket/large container.
4. Stir in the citric acid thoroughly
5. Add the glycerites
6. Stir thoroughly
7. Decant into smaller bottles and label

## ANTIMICROBIAL VINEGAR

The antimicrobial vinegar blend is combined with glycerites to form our staple immune tonic. Prior to the development of the immune tonic, we used to dispense the vinegar on its own, but the flavour is not very popular! Likewise, for many people with gut health issues, vinegar can be too strong. Blended with a glycerite it is much more softening. We do still have a stand alone glycerite for people with acid reflux and other issues where vinegar is not appropriate.

This antimicrobial vinegar combines 5 litres of apple cider vinegar components:

1. A cold-infused herbal vinegar
2. A warm infused herbal vinegar
3. Original raw apple cider vinegar with the mother

### Cold Infused Herbal Vinegar

See the medicine making section on how to make a cold-infused herbal vinegar. You will need to use approximately 800 ml of apple cider vinegar and 750g of fresh plant material. Example ingredients include fresh herbs of:

- Up to 750g Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- Up to 750g Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
- Up to 400g Ivy (*Hedera helix*)
- Up to 400g Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)
- Up to 400g Mint (*Mentha spp.*)
- Up to 300g Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)
- Up to 30g Chillies (*Capsicum annuum*)

These need to be infused for at least a week.



### Warm Infused Vinegar

See the medicine making section on how to make a warm-infused herbal vinegar in a slow cooker if possible. You will need to use approximately 3.5 litres of apple cider vinegar combined with the following ingredients:

- 400g of fresh herbs
- 400g of dried herbs, from list one
- 200g of dried herbs, from list two

The herbs and vinegar are combined in a slow cooker and warmed for two hours at intermittent intervals. They are left to infuse overnight. I find this mix has particularly strong volatile oils due to the herbs chosen so please ensure you have ventilation in the house or where you are medicine making to prevent a headache!

**Potential fresh herbs include:**

- Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)
- Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticana*)
- Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)

**Dried herbs, list one:**

- No more than 100g Star Anise (*Illicium verum*)
- No more than 200g Cinnamon (*Cinnamon cassia*)
- No more than 75g Cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*) or Black Cardamom (*Amomum subulatum*)
- No more than 50g Ajwain (*Trachyspermum ammi*)
- No more than 50g Mustard Seed (*Brassica nigra*)
- No more than 100g Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)
- NB - I have added dried Elderberries (*Sambucus nigra*) to this original recipe for flavour and taste (and of course medicinal properties). No more than 200g.

**Dried herbs, list two:**

- No more than 25g Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- No more than 25g Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- No more than 50g Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)
- No more than 50g Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)
- No more than 25g Ajwain (*Trachyspermum ammi*)
- No more than 50g Mint (*Mentha spp*)
- No more than 25g Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
- No more than 25g Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

**Final steps:** Once you have strained the warm-infused vinegar and the cold-infused vinegar, add the original apple cider vinegar that is left. Decant into bottles and label.



## BRUISE OINTMENTS

The simple recipe for the Calais Bruise Ointment is very effective not only for bruises, but also muscle pain in general, as well as sprains and strains. Many people use it for old injuries that are becoming painful due to the cold temperatures in Calais in winter or for sleeping outside with little underground protection. Many people in Calais also sprain ankles, pull muscles and injure ligaments from daily walking, running and climbing fences to escape police. We encourage people to apply it generously to the affected area. It's also very effective underneath a musculoskeletal support such as vet wrap. The bruise ointment is safe for children.

**Quantities:** To make 500ml (roughly 10 x 50ml pots).

### Ingredients

- 200 mls of Daisy (*Bellis perennis*) or Arnica (*Arnica montana*) infused oil (or a combination)
- 150 mls of Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) infused oil
- 100 mls of St John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) infused oil
- 45g of beeswax or vegan alternative such as soy wax
- 6 ml Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) essential oil
- 4 ml of Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) essential oil

### Method

1. Purchase or prepare your infused oil. If making your own infused oil, you might use castor, olive or almond oil. Hypericum and daisies work ok using the fresh plant/sun infused method. Comfrey works better as a dried plant infusion via the Bain Marie method.
2. Combine your oils in a metal or pyrex jug.
3. Place the jug in a saucepan of boiling water - heat gently via the Bain Marie method.
4. Add beeswax and stir until fully dissolved.
5. Remove from heat and quickly stir in essential oils.
6. Pour into jars.

## CALAIS MOUTHWASH & GARGLE

This mouthwash is a fantastic addition to any mobile clinic. It combines strongly antiseptic, astringent and vulnerary (wound healing) herbs to make a very strong mix which is then diluted before being given out. We use the mouthwash for people struggling with coughs, colds and sore throats. As well as for people experiencing dental pain or issues. With all our medicines we ensure people have the information to access further care, such as a dentist, in addition to having symptomatic relief with our medicines.

### Part One - Strong antimicrobial and vulnerary herbs

25% of the blend. Ingredients could include one or more tinctures of:

- Myrrh (*Commiphora molmol*)
- Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) 90% proof

### Part Two - Antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory and vulnerary herbs

45% of the blend. Ingredients could include two or more tinctures of:

- Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea/angustifolia*)
- Clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*)
- Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
- Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*)
- Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) 25% proof

### Part Three - Astringent Herbs

20% of the blend. Ingredients could include one or more tinctures of:

- Oak (*Quercus alba*)
- Herb Bennet (*Geum urbanum*)
- Raspberry leaf (*Rubus idaeus*)
- Tormetil (*Potentilla erecta*)
- Cranesbill (*Geranium maculatum*)



Raspberry leaf

### Part Four - Harmoniser

5% of the blend. Licorice adds its own medicinal properties and also flavours

the blend. Liquorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) 1:1 Fluid extract.

### **Part 5 - Essential Oils**

- 4% of the blend. Clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*) essential oil
- 2% of the blend. One or more of these essential oils:
- Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*)
- Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*)
- Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

### **Part 6 - Dilution**

Dilute the blend 1:3 - one part stock mouthwash with two thirds shop-bought mouthwash or a floral water.

### **Sample recipe for 100ml of stock mouthwash & gargle**

- Myrrh 25ml
- Liquorice 1:1 5ml
- Calendula 25% 15ml
- Oak 20ml
- Sage 15ml
- Echinacea 15ml
- Clove Essential Oil 4ml
- Peppermint Essential Oil 1ml

## **WOUND SPRAYS**

We use a mix of wound sprays and washes in our clinic. All wounds are cleaned with saline water from bottles (we use the brand HypacLens) simply to ensure wounds are as clean as possible. Depending on the wound presenting, we will then either use a strong wound spray or a witch hazel spray. The nuances of use include how fresh a wound is, what we are doing (for example, if we are consistently clearing a wound of debris then using the witch hazel spray is much gentler than one with alcohol which is better as a disinfectant).

## Strong Wound Spray

We package our wound spray in small 50ml spray bottles. This means we are able to give them to refugees alongside a wound care pack of dressings/plasters/gloves or whatever they need to safely change their own dressings. Alongside information of other agencies available to help change dressings. The wound spray combines:

- Myrrh Tincture (*Commiphora molmol*) One-third
- Calendula Tincture (*Calendula officinalis*) One-third
- Water (Must be good quality/a clean source) One-third

## Witch Hazel Spray

This is simply distilled water Witch Hazel extract (*Hamamelis virginiana*) that we purchase. It's astringent, calming, cooling and antiseptic.

## Rose Water and Witch Hazel Spray

We combine Witch Hazel (see above) with Rose Water 50/50. Rose water (*Rosa spp.*) is antibacterial, astringent, hydrating and anti-inflammatory. We use this spray for people with different skin conditions, such as simple acne. We dispense a little plastic bag with cotton pads and encourage them to cleanse their face twice a day.

## ANTI-ITCH SPRAY

This is a spray that has been developed as a strong counter irritant for when someone is disturbed by itching, from mosquito bites or scabies for example. It will not necessarily treat things like scabies but it will enable a person to finally get some respite from relentless itching. It gives the tissues a chance to heal and prevent further infection. It is antihistamine, soothing and distracting.

To make one litre that can then be decanted into small 25ml spray bottles:

- 250 mls Ephedra Tincture (*Ephedra sinica*) - please note this herb is not always easy to access but the mix is still potent without it
- 250mls Nettle vinegar (*Urtica dioica*)
- 300ml distilled Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)
- 200mls of either:

- Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) vinegar
- Ivy (*Hedera helix*) vinegar
- Cleavers (*Galium aparine*) vinegar
- 50ml Calendula 90% Tincture
- 20ml Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) Essential Oil
- 10ml Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) Essential Oil

## INDIGESTION LOZENGES

Our indigestion lozenges are a staple in our clinic in Calais. Many people we meet are struggling with acid reflux and indigestion due to chronic stress, as well as food intolerances and the difficulties in adapting to a new diet. The one food distribution by the French state consists of a baguette and cheese, for example. Despite the incredible efforts of projects such as Refugee Community Kitchen and Calais Food Collective, many people still face regular bouts of hunger (for example while attempting to cross the channel). Coupled with risks of bacterial infections from camp conditions, the living conditions can play havoc on people's gut microbiology.

These lozenges contain herbal powders that are mucilaginous, soothing and anti-inflammatory which can help bring some relief from reflux and indigestion but also support with the healing of the mucosa. They do not keep very long, so it's best to make them in small batches and ensure they are distributed or consumed.

### What you need

- Glycerine
- Rose water (*Rosa spp.*)
- Marshmallow powder (*Althaea officinalis*)
- Meadowsweet powder (*Filipendula ulmaria*)
- Licorice powder (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)
- Bowls
- Spoon
- Measuring jugs
- Chopping boards/mats



- Trays
- Rolling pins
- Bags/containers to store the lozenges
- Sieve
- Apple corer or butter knife

**Quantities:** Makes 25 packets of lozenges  
(increase or reduce to suit your needs)

- 300g Marshmallow powder
- 300g Meadowsweet powder
- 375ml Glycerine
- 500ml Rose water
- 50g Licorice powder (approx)



## Method

1. Weigh the marshmallow and meadowsweet powders
2. Combine them in a bowl and mix well
3. Slowly add glycerine and rose water
4. Add a bit and then mix, then repeat
5. Mix well until desired consistency is achieved (you want them sticky enough to be able to roll a sausage without them falling apart, moist but not too wet)
6. Line trays and surface area of chopping boards/mats with licorice powder
7. Make the mix into sausages or pancakes about 1cm thick. Roll around dusting with licorice powder
8. If making a pancake shape, use an apple corer to cut out small round-shaped lozenges
9. If making a sausage shape, cut with a butter knife into lozenges
10. Leave overnight to dry in the trays with licorice powder
11. Sieve and bag up



## OTHER HERBAL ITEMS USED IN THE CLINIC

There are a number of other herbal medicines we use in the clinic in Calais that I briefly cover in this section.

### Creams

The complexity of cream making is beyond the scope of the medicine making featured in this book. It's a whole interesting world of preservatives and other considerations, but I wanted to share at least the ingredients for the common creams we use in the clinic to inspire and inform others.

### Calendula Cream

This is one of our amazing 'base creams' that we use as the base of our anti-fungal cream due to calendula's amazing antimicrobial properties. It also has a wonderful thick consistency making it great as a general skin cream for dry skin as well as many other skin complaints.

### Anti-fungal Cream

This is a recipe developed by herbalist Melissa Ronaldson that is designed to be 'pokey' meaning strong, drying and healing to feet with wet, damp fungal infections. It is not for open or delicate areas. The cream contains different ingredients (some of which can be interchanged):

- Aqueous cream or Calendula cream as a base
- Almond oil
- Castor oil
- Neem oil or Thyme Oil
- Zinc Oxide

Tinctures:

- Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- Thuja (*Thuja Occidentalis*)
- Chaparral (*Larrea tridentata*)

Essential oils:

- Tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)



Chickweed

## **Anti-itch Cream**

This is a cream for soothing itchy skin caused by bites and mites such as scabies. It can help skin that is dry and abrasive from so much scratching. It's soothing, moistening, as well as antimicrobial. It contains:

- Peppermint hydrosol (*Mentha piperita*)
- Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) infused oil (normally in sunflower oil)
- Olivem 1000 - a PEG-free (polyethylene glycols) emulsifier and thickener
- Vitamin E
- Preservative Eco (a broad spectrum preservative free from parabens, phenoxyethanol, isothiazolones, or formaldehyde)

## **Chamomile Cream**

Our chamomile cream is wonderful for a variety of skin complaints. It is soothing and anti-inflammatory for irritated skin, eczema and other conditions. It's antibacterial and great for acne, which is one of the common complaints from many people we see with the clinic who are teenagers going through puberty.

It contains:

- Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) hydrosol
- Chamomile infused oil
- Olivem 1000
- Glycerine
- Beeswax
- Vitamin E
- Preservative Eco

## **OTHER MEDICINES**

### **Extra-strong cough mix**

In addition to our cough syrup that I've shared the recipe for already, we also have an extra strong mix for people that have more chronic infections. We make sure we have asked them the right screening questions and we always signpost to the hospital if needed or for an antibiotic prescription. We complement these actions with this mix (depending on someone's language skills and understanding as we don't want to give the impression that this is the only treatment they may need).

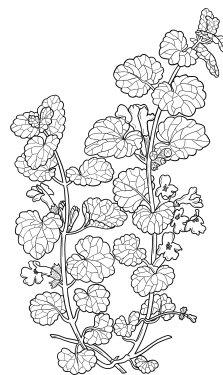


Our extra-strong respiratory blend has changed over time depending on the stock we have available but it generally contains a combination of:

- Lobelia vinegar or glycerite (*Lobelia inflata*)
- Elecampane glycerite (*Inula helenium*)
- Ground Ivy glycerite (*Glechoma hederacea*)
- Honeysuckle vinegar (*Lonicera caprifolia*)
- Elderberry vinegar (*Sambucus nigra*)

Essential oils:

- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*)
- Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)
- Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)



Ground Ivy

We make these up either as glycerites, or if we use tinctures we make sure to get consent from the person first about consuming alcohol. Many people are comfortable because of it being for medicinal purposes, however, we cannot take it for granted without checking. If we are able to include alcohol we generally ensure some high quality Echinacea tincture (*Echinacea purpurea/angustifolia*).

## Allergy Blend

This allergy blend contains a mix of great herbs that are supportive for seasonal allergies such as hay fever. We encourage people to take a shot/big swig of it at least three times a day and it has proven very effective and supported people to gain some relief. It contains:

- Nettle glycerite (*Urtica dioica*)
- Chamomile glycerite (*Matricaria chamomilla*)
- Nettle vinegar (*Urtica dioica*)
- Ivy vinegar (*Hedera helix*)
- Plantain vinegar (*Plantago lanceolata/Plantago major*)
- Chickweed vinegar (*Stellaria media*)

## Aloe vera gel

Aloe vera (*Aloe barbadensis miller*) is a gift from the gods! We combine aloe vera gel with the Baikal Skullcap powder (see below) to create a very effective wound paste for dry and infected wounds. There are many more nuances to wound

care beyond this book. We also use aloe vera and essential oils together if the powder is not appropriate. Sometimes we may also make up something bespoke with the gel, for example combining it with lavender oil and some essential oils, depending on the person's needs. It's super versatile.

### **Burn gel**

If a burn is assessed to be minor enough to not need to go to hospital and after we've thoroughly irrigated it, we dress the wound with our burn gel. The gel is a combination of aloe vera gel and lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) essential oil. I don't know the exact quantities of lavender but it's basically a lot! It's super effective in burn treatment. We then cover with a dressing if needed.

### **Baikal Skullcap Powder**

Baikal Skullcap (*Scutellaria baicalensis*) powder is one of our mainstay powders for wound treatment. It's incredibly antimicrobial and effective for wound treatment and healing. We will combine it with aloe vera gel (see above) for dry and infected wounds, or if a wound is very damp with a lot of exudate we may just use the powder alone. Wound care is very nuanced and beyond the scope of this book. We source the powder from TCM (traditional Chinese Medicine) suppliers so that it is very fine in size and high quality.

### **Myrrh powder**

Myrrh (*Commiphora myrrha*) is also very effective in wound care due to its antimicrobial and wound healing properties. The challenge with myrrh is that it's very dark so if you apply it, it may then look like the wound is infected or dirty, for example. We need to be very cautious and considerate in Calais thinking about how the next medic is going to perceive the status of the wound. This is why for example, we also cannot use activated charcoal powder which is black and can give the impression a wound has become necrotic!

### **Marshmallow powder**

Aside from being fantastic in our cough syrup, we use Marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*) powder separately in the clinic to support people with eye inflammation. Once all the other eye assessment and first aid protocols have been followed, if someone's eye is inflamed, we may make a poultice with marshmallow powder. This involves adding the powder to an empty tea bag and infusing it in hot water.

We then place the tea bag on the person's eye (at the warmest temperature they can handle) for at least 5 minutes. People are always surprised when we remove the teabag just how much 'gunk' or exudate comes from the eye and can be wiped away and cleaned. This is because marshmallow has fantastic drawing properties, as well as being soothing, anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial. It's very important that the powder is kept in a tightly sealed container to prevent contamination in between uses.

## OTHER FIRST AID ITEMS USED IN THE CLINIC

I thought it would be interesting for people seeking to start similar projects to the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais to see what other first aid essentials we take out with us in the field. We have done our best to strategically fit huge amounts of different items packed into the van.

### General items:

- Emergency go-bag in case we are called away from the clinic to respond to an emergency
- Masks for team and distribution
- New Arrival Guides - these are information leaflets on local services such as where to access the hospital, translated into multiple languages
- Clipboard with our daily clinical tracker sheet where we record the presented conditions
- Referral forms - these are two-sheet forms where our doctor or clinical supervisor can write a referral to a local clinic or other service and we can keep a copy. This is very helpful especially when there have been translation challenges.
- Translated stool chart - we have an arabic version of the Bristol Stool Chart so that people can more easily point to how their stools look
- Pens
- Pen torch - for looking in people's throats
- Gloves and socks - we distribute warm gloves and socks in the winter to the best of our ability and budget. We distribute thinner socks in summer.
- Baby wipes for helping clean people's skin if needed (many people get very muddy), these are not for wound cleaning
- Tissues - tissues are great for

people with colds etc but are also a good way to attract people to the clinic

- Bin bags
- Paper roll
- Hot water carriers - for our foot baths
- 5L water bottles - we use water in our foot baths so it's not boiling hot for people. We also make sure we have some available in case people request it. At the end of the day we give people empty carriers.
- Urn - we take out hot tea. The recipe changes depending on the season but generally lemon and ginger in the winter (which is often very culturally familiar) or lemon, mint and lemon balm in the summer.
- Paper cups for tea
- Spare clothes (stored in van cupboards in case of people coming out of the water)
- Team passports in case of police stops
- Green vests or 'bibs' which can help communicate who is working and that we are available as medics
- Blood pressure monitor
- Antiseptic wipes for wiping down our tables and chairs, especially helpful when there is wind constantly bringing dust!

- Antiseptic spray for cleaning foot care trays and other items
- Waterproofs for the team
- The clinic mobile phone so that we can take people's numbers who we need to follow up with, call the emergency services or other agencies when needed

### **Foot care**

- Foot bath bowls (washing up bowls x 2)
- Foot and hand bath trays - we use large disposable barbeque trays bought from the supermarket. We also use smaller ones for hand baths.
- Epsom salts - used when giving foot baths
- Foot care trays - these are specialist trays where we can place someone's foot and have them on our knee or on a stool (see picture). They are fantastic as they can be easily disinfected and wiped clean through the day.

### **Women and children's bag**

- Infant chest rubs
- Elderberry cough syrup that is safe and tasty for children
- Sanitary towels, tampons, panty liners
- Baby wipes
- Nappies of different sizes

## First aid drawers

We have experimented with a lot of different systems and storage options to transport our many clinic items! We've settled on the use of drawers for easy access and storage. We have one large stack of first aid drawers (see pictures) that helps to organise our items.

### Top Drawer

- Plastic pots - we use these for making up one of our wound care pastes, as well as dispensing different things such as aloe vera gel
- Diagnostic equipment including:
- Thermometer and caps
- Otoscope and caps
- Urine tests and sample pots
- Stethoscopes
- Pulse oximeter and batteries
- Disposable thermometers
- A box of foot care items:
- Nail files
- Nail clippers
- Disposable tweezers
- Tweezers
- Other specific foot care tools and sharps
- Plastic bags (for creating wound care packs, for example)
- Ear cleaning buds
- Spare bottles (2 x white tubs, amber bottles, spray bottles) - in

case of dispensing something bespoke

- Empty tea bags - which we use to make marshmallow eye poultices
- Cling film
- Knit combs
- Knit lotion

### Second Drawer

- Conforming bandages:
- 5cm
- 7.5cm
- 10cm
- Large and small splints
- Emergency blankets
- Safety pins
- Wrist supports
- Calf supports
- Ankle supports
- Knee supports
- Triangular bandages
- Toe tubing
- Medium sterile dressings
- Finger and toe bandages



## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* **CARE PACKAGES FOR DISPLACED WOMEN**

*Mila's Apothecary*

Before the pandemic I was living and volunteering with displaced people in Athens. In the women's space in one of the camps we would make herbal skincare and soaps together, infused with ingredients I picked up at my local herb shop. I moved back to England before the borders were shut due to covid, and unable to volunteer in person, I realised I could use my skills to create herbal self care packages to send to displaced women here in the UK. My focus with these packages has been on creating soothing formulations that nourish the skin and help people to relax, with lots of calming herbs like lavender, rose and chamomile.

I've teamed up with people from various grassroots organisations to find women I could send the packages to, and have been touched by some of these women getting in contact with me to tell me how much they have appreciated these products, and the comfort they've felt from using them and knowing that someone they'd never met before was thinking of them. This ongoing project has been a reminder for me that no matter how small an act of solidarity may seem, it can have such a positive impact on someone's day and show people that although what they have been subjected to may have made them feel otherwise, that they are not invisible, and that they are deserving of kindness, love and care.

An example pack could look something like this:

- A calming lavender bud infused body oil, to encourage people to feel safe in their bodies by using it in a self-massage practice.
- A multipurpose moisturising calendula balm or body butter for chapped lips, dry and itchy skin and hands, sore nipples etc.
- A rose glycerite to be taken internally, I see rose as a warm embrace from a loving friend, helping us as we navigate times of deep grief, stress and upheaval.
- A floral distillate, typically lavender or rose water, that serves as a little pick-me-up, soothing to both skin and mind

*Mila is an aid worker, freelance writer, and lover of all that's good in the world. She runs a small apothecary brand in the South East of the UK, creating skincare and herbal remedies from her home in the woods. If you would like to reach out, she is always up for a chat and is active on her instagram page @milasapothecary.*



## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* **SOLIDARITY FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DIRECT PROVISION IN IRELAND**

What is direct provision? Amnesty International describe the system in Ireland:

*“Direct Provision (DP) was established in 2000 and is Ireland’s system of state provided accommodation and other basic necessities to people seeking international protection. DP centres are mainly hostels, hotels and other accommodation owned and run by private companies for profit, paid for by the Government.*

*DP was designed as a short-term emergency measure. Instead it has lasted more than 21 years. People were meant to spend no longer than six months while their asylum application was processed. Instead, they are trapped in limbo, often for years. Many are in overcrowded conditions, sharing bedrooms and bathrooms with strangers, lacking dignity and privacy.*

*The living conditions, institutionalised regime and lack of appropriate support services are unacceptable for anyone, especially for such long periods of time. It is particularly harsh for families, children, people who have experienced trauma, sexual violence or torture, and other vulnerable people.*

*DP centres are often in isolated locations far from local communities. The isolation and hopelessness can damage physical and mental health and hinders people’s ability to restart their lives once recognised as refugees. For torture survivors, it can severely compromise their rehabilitation.”<sup>1</sup>*

The wonderful herbal crew Herbalista that have been featured throughout this book, have a number of projects in Ireland including Dublin Herb Bike and Cork Herb Bike. The group has supported people in Direct Provision through care packages as well as herb stations at events.

One of their main items has been the Solidarity Soother Compound which is detailed next.

### **References**

1. <https://www.amnesty.ie/end-direct-provision/>



## *Contribution: Remedies & Recipes*

### SOLIDARITY SOOTHER COMPOUND

*Herbalista*

This hot glycerite compound is a tasty way to offer soothing support during stressful times. We made the first big batch for the Dublin Herb Bike to support asylum seekers living in uncertainty in Direct Provision. You can use any number of nervine and adaptogenic herbs in this blend and this blend can change depending on what we have available. This blend avoids herbs that might be too sedative (i.e. valerian, hops, etc.) so it can be used any time of day. Glycerine is a non-alcoholic base and is also safe for use by diabetics. This can also be prepared as an alcohol-based compound.

**Other options:** passionflower, motherwort, rose petal, catnip, blue vervain, mimosa flower, linden, etc

#### **Recipe**

- Tincture at a 1:6 Ratio, Glycerine 60%, 40% Water or Hydrosol
- Skullcap 1 part
- Lemon Balm 1 part
- Tulsi Basil 1 part
- Milky Oats 1 part
- Fennel or Chamomile 1 part

**Dosage:** Take 1 tsp. as desired to support the nervous system, relieve stress and soothe your spirits!

**Cautions:** Please, as always, use common sense. Depending on the herbs you choose, there will be different cautions i.e. chamomile: some folks have allergies or motherwort/ lemon balm combo: not best choice for folks suffering hypothyroidism.

<https://herbalista.org/>

**PART 6:**  
**GENOCIDE, OCCUPATION**  
**& WAR**

## INTRODUCTION - PLANT MEDICINES IN A WAR CONTEXT

In this part of the book, I want to introduce two projects - Ukraine Herbal Solidarity - that distributed 17,000 medicines to refugees at the start of the genocidal invasion of Ukraine, and the making of lavender oil to support the diaspora of Palestine who are organising fiercely against occupation and genocide. I also share a contributor piece about herbal medicine in Armenia.

This section of the book briefly explores the roles of plant medicines in contexts of war. I want to preface that war can give an impression of a two-sided battle - but this chapter encompasses genocidal invasions, such as Ukraine as well as occupation and genocide in Palestine. Calling these ‘conflicts’ can give the impression that it’s simply two ethnic groups fighting each other when in fact it is self-defence against ongoing colonial violence. I’ve chosen the word ‘war’ to distinguish from ongoing instances of state violence and repression, and indicate an escalation in violence where people are responding to mass casualties and unprecedented scales of death, trauma, and violence.

In this introduction, I will present some plant medicines used in different wars throughout history. I don’t in any way want this section to inadvertently glorify wars or the mass death they cause. What interests me is the medicinal resilience at play - that we have drawn on plant medicines in different contexts for millenia and that it is possible to develop infrastructure to harvest and produce medicines *en masse* to sustain fighting forces. I certainly don’t want to advocate for Empire or state armies, such as the British Army that have long been a colonial engine of occupation, suffering and death, both to the people it is violently colonising and to the mostly working-class men recruited or forced to fight through generations. I also want to share that I’m not a pacifist, and that I recognise the necessity of revolutionary struggles in which people may need to defend themselves with arms and warfare.

### **Plant Medicines in war zones throughout history**

The history of humans is the history of plant medicines - they have always been our major source of medicine in every corner of the planet. Unsurprisingly, this is especially true during times of war. I find it critical to look at historical

examples as they help us ask questions about the roles of plant medicines in our current contexts, as well as what infrastructure we could develop to increase our resilience. These historical examples help to illuminate that which is missing from our current contexts, whether that's communities no longer having the plant identification skills to harvest in a mass decentralised way, or the lack of infrastructure for harvesting and drying, or even potential missing modern research around herbal medicines in a wound care and combat trauma context.

### **Ancient wars**

We know a lot about the plant medicines of previous empires due to the documentation of herbal properties. An example of such documentation is the five-volume encyclopaedia, *De materia medica*, written between 50 and 70 CE, by Dioscorides, a Greek physician and botanist. There are references to many plant medicines used in battle. Angharad Johnson writing in *Battlefield Botanicals* shares that:

*“If there is one botanic flag-bearer of war, Yarrow (Achillea millefolium) wins the prize. According to Greek mythology, it grew from the spear of the mighty war hero Achilles, which he then applied to his soldier’s wounds. Army medics throughout time put this myth into practice, knowing that this Herba militaris coagulated blood from seeping wounds, and thereby deriving its other traditional names, soldiers’ woundwort and staunch weed.”*<sup>1</sup>

It is also known, for example, that Indigenous communities worldwide have worked with plant medicines for millenia and that practices such as arrow tips being infused in decoctions of deadly and poisonous plants were common practices<sup>2</sup>.

Johnson writes that plants were also consumed pre-battle to create an altered mind-state and lessen fatigue or fear<sup>3</sup>. I believe, anecdotally from friends who have worked as medics in Ukraine, that this is still the case - the desire for drugs in order to enable dissociation from the horrific realities of trench warfare are in huge demand.

### **The American Civil War**

Johnson gives us an insight into herbal use during the American Civil War:

*“The phrase, ‘disease, not battle, digs the soldiers’ grave’ can be applied to many wars. Hundreds were victorious in the field only to perish later from unsanitary living conditions. During the American Civil War (1861-1865), nearly ten million soldiers required aid. With*

medicines scarce, an estimated two thirds of all treatments came from plants. Quinine (*Cinchona spp.*) was used to ward off malaria; a near lethal concoction called 'Blue Mass' including marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*) and mercury, for dysentery; and pennyroyal (*Hedeoma pulegioides*) to reduce fever. Precious supplies were smuggled in by civilians, sometimes sewn into secret petticoat pockets in the voluminous skirts of women, or else the troops foraged. One southern soldier wrote that the woods were his 'drug store'. In more practical terms, twigs became toothbrushes, chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) made a coffee substitute, and some made ink from berry juice of pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*), to write letters home to loved ones."<sup>4</sup>

## First World War

The main herb that gets a mention in the First World War is Peat Moss (*Sphagnum spp.*). Johnson writes:

"During World War I, septic wounds were rife and sterile bandages in short supply on all sides. Used since the Bronze Age to staunch wounds, peat moss (*Sphagnum spp.*) became literally, a lifesaver, being twice as absorbent as cotton and containing antiseptic iodine. Volunteers rallied around Europe and North America to collect staggering quantities of bog moss to be distributed to field hospitals. One man is said to have walked 1000 miles to collect moss and 'do his bit' for the war effort."<sup>5</sup>

Peter Ayres in the book *Britain's green allies. Medicinal plants in wartime* writes about the extraordinary capacity of *Sphagnum* to absorb and retain water, reporting that ten ounces (283g) of dried moss could hold seventy ounces (nearly two kilograms) of water and that the moss could equally well absorb blood, pus, lymph, or other bodily fluids, being at least twice as absorptive as cotton wool<sup>6</sup>.

He adds that:

"By the end of WWI up to a million dressings per month were being sent to military hospitals in Britain, at the Western Front, and in theatres of war that included Egypt and Mesopotamia, Serbia and Russia. They helped to save countless soldiers from death, or the amputation of limbs, for wound infections were a huge problem, especially on the Western Front."<sup>7</sup>

Briony Hudson writes in *Medicinal plants: Britain's home-grown wartime allies* about other medicinal plants:

"During the First World War, the Government drew up a list of key plants to grow, forage, dry and process to produce medicines for the British public, including belladonna for atropine; henbane and stramonium for hyoscyamine; foxglove for digitoxin; autumn crocus for colchicine;

*and valerian for valerium.*”<sup>7</sup>

Three members of the Solanaceae family were listed - belladonna, henbane, and datura. Autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*) has the active ingredient of colchicum, which is effective in reducing inflammation. Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) was also listed as a herb that helps to improve the force and efficiency of cardiac output in patients suffering arrhythmias. Valerian, as referenced several times in this book, was used as a sedative and was commonly given to soldiers suffering shell shock.

The collective cultivation and harvesting of plant medicines, while important in World War One, was overshadowed by its dramatic importance and implementation in World War Two.

## **Second World War**

In the Second World War, efforts were coordinated more successfully on a national scale.

Jemma Houghton details in *‘Digging for Drugs’: the Medicinal Plant Collection Scheme of the Second World War*:

*“The Medicinal Plant Collection Scheme was established in March 1941 by the Ministry of Health with an extensive organisational network. The Vegetable Drugs Committee was supported by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the Oxford Medicinal Plant Scheme, and County Herb Committees. These coordinated the many groups participating from voluntary bodies to drug companies. The National Federation of Women’s Institutes, Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, and schoolchildren were all involved. The scheme made a substantial contribution to the war effort but was wound down soon after.”*<sup>8</sup>

There were more than seventy County Medicinal Herb Committees. Hudson writes:

*“This framework not only meant that small collections of particular plant materials could be amassed in central locations to allow wholesale levels of production, but also that the women (and men) involved in collection could receive lectures and training from the pharmaceutical industry and schools of pharmacy to improve their knowledge of what they were collecting and why.”*<sup>9</sup>

Hudson writes that over the course of the Second World War, lay collectors gathered almost 5,000 tons of medicinal plants (dry weight), equating to around

£125,000 worth at the time. For anyone who has harvested and dried a herb you can appreciate how much herb material this must have been!

We also cannot speak about war herbal medicine without speaking about poppies. In her book, *Plants Go to War: A Botanical History of World War II*, Judith Sumner writes, “Of all botanical compounds, the single most important wartime drug was morphine [from opium poppies] for pain control in combat wounds.”<sup>10</sup>

Ayres dives into the coordination of the harvesting of medicinal herbs. He mentions how grants enabled County Herb Committees to establish drying centres, approximately 250 of which were established by the end of the war.

He adds that nettles were harvested too for their extractable chlorophyll, used in the synthesis of anti-asthma drugs and as an effective green dye for fats, soaps, and even camouflage materials. Broom tops (*Cytisus scoparius*) were harvested for sparteine, a drug used to control high blood-pressure. Horse chestnuts, (or conkers as we know them in the UK) (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), were also collected because of the glucose and acetone that can be prepared from them<sup>11</sup>. Sumner adds that collectors also dried algae for medicinal iodine and agar<sup>12</sup>.

Probably the most well-known herb harvested during the Second World War were rosehips (at least I always see this referenced in herbal monographs). Ayres writes that the Ministry of Health were concerned about the deficiency of vitamin C (ascorbic acid) in the diet, not of soldiers but rather of infants and small children, a shortage attributable to the cessation of imports of citrus fruits. It was announced in 1943 that five hundred tonnes of rosehips had been collected which was enough for two and a half million bottles of syrup, saving Britain from having to import twenty-five million oranges<sup>13</sup>.

What is interesting to me is the coordination and development of infrastructure - the various committees, training and resources developed, drying infrastructure and involvement of different community groups. It gives me inspiration that this level of organisation could be possible again. Medicines could be made



Rosehips

and distributed amongst grassroots community herbalism projects and clinics serving people experiencing state violence. We could have whole networks of mobile clinics at border hotspots, or free clinics providing care to people forced to live in poverty due to state policy and capitalism.

### **The continuing dependence on Colonial Medicine**

I wanted to name that while there are some inspiring examples of mass scale coordination of harvesting herbs with many grassroots groups and community members, such as school children and Women's Institutes, the sourcing of medicinal herbs through these world wars in general still rested on British colonialism.

The majority of medicines still came from colonised lands and the minority were harvested from hedgerows in England, Wales and Scotland. The colonial extraction and importation of plant medicines is still what sustains herbal medicine (as an industry, perhaps not individual herbalist practitioners making their own medicines). In *Business of Botanicals*, Ann Armbrrecht explores this further. Houghton summarises:

*“The medicinal plant collection scheme of the Second World War thus carried legacies of British imperial practices of procuring drugs and other medical items from its colonies. Both British and American pharmaceutical industries depended heavily on African medicinal plants well into the twentieth century. This article has thus shown that plants remained significant in British medical culture in the twentieth century, and that the Second World War was not the moment of medical revolution that it has often been depicted to be in academic literature.”*<sup>14</sup>

### **When plant medicines meet fascism**

It was not just people in Britain harvesting medicinal herbs as part of a nationalistic war effort. The Nazis also exploited occupied regions to cultivate medicinal plants. Ayres writes that:

*“Under German direction, crops of opium poppy were sown in Denmark, while acreages of digitalis, belladonna, and valerian were greatly increased in Ukraine (a traditional exporter of such materia medica). And following the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, that country's railways were ‘reorganised’. In the process, briar roses were planted alongside new embankments in order to ensure future crops of vitamin C-rich rosehips.”*<sup>15</sup>

Houghton speaks to how medicinal plant gathering by the public was deeply embedded within a wider nationalisation and idealisation of herbalism in Nazi



medicine:

*“‘Neue Deutsche Heilkunde’” (New German Medicine) was strongly advocated by members of the National Socialist Party, including the leader of the Reich Physicians Chamber, Gerhard Wagner. Support for natural-based medicine predated the ascension of the National Socialist Party; the popularity of natural medicine over ‘scientific’ therapeutics began in the mid-nineteenth century. The natural medicine movement, according to Ernst, was driven by public support for herbalism and other alternative medical practices. The scheme under the Third Reich was promoted through a lens of racial purity, with German plants from German soil being the most Aryan of medicines.”<sup>16</sup>*

### **Plant medicines in revolutionary contexts**

While the first and second world wars sent millions of working-class people to the slaughter (even though I recognise defeating fascism was necessary), anarchists throughout history have criticised the war machine and the military industrial complex (see glossary).

There are also examples of military action in more revolutionary contexts. Two recent examples come to mind - the Zapatistas and the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Both have waged guerilla wars to maintain autonomous regions, experimenting with radical attempts at democracies and remakings of society. It's worth noting that traditional herbal medicine is still strong in both of these regions.

Raul Ruiz writes about ‘Medicinal herbs in times of low intensity warfare’ in Chiapas, Mexico. He writes: *“My initial understanding of herbal medicine as a viable substitute for Chiapas’s scarce health care services changed to a deeper understanding of the socioeconomic and political interplay between using the herb or the pill. Poverty, war, indigenismo, the culture of medicalization, and their lack of knowledge of herbal remedies influence the health promoters motivations and limitations in using medicinal plants.”<sup>17</sup>*

I think his article illuminates many of the complexities at play with herbal medicine - the need for integrative approaches (including allopathic medicines) and the reality that there are very few places untouched by the forces of colonialism. We can romanticise plant medicines at times, and forget that many people still don't know their local medicinal plants. This can be due to forced migration to different bioregions, or because knowledge had been repressed and forgotten. It may simply be that herbal practice is often centred on self-care but when we get into the terrains of understanding diseases, pathology, anatomy

and physiology etc, home herbalists hit their limitations. Many communities worldwide have herbalists versed in this knowledge and are able to serve people, however, many do not. Constant knowledge and skill sharing around medicinal plants, therefore, is so vital wherever we are.

Another movement reclaiming plant medicines and embracing their use is the Kurdish Freedom Movement. One example is Jinwar Free Women's Village - an ecological women's village in the heart of Rojava, North Eastern Syria. They speak about a health centre they have developed in the village:

*“‘Şîfa Jin’ [Women’s Healing] is a healing and health centre for women and children of Jinwar and the surrounding area. In addition to treatments based on naturopathic and modern medicine, the centre produces its own medicines from medicinal plants. The basic philosophy of ‘Şîfa Jin’ is that health is a mirror of the way of life, relationships with society and the environment, and thus reflects the history of oppression and resistance.”<sup>18</sup>*

There are many other examples of plant medicines supporting people's struggles for freedom and autonomy, whether that's medicine used by enslaved people for birth control, or herbal first aid used during battles with missionaries or colonisers.

The questions all of these examples make me ask are:

- What is the role of plant medicines in people's self-defence?
- What is the role of plant medicines in combat medicine situations?
- Why would we wait for a 'wartime' situation when people are already suffering from poverty, chronic illness caused by capitalism and state violence?
- How do we prepare the infrastructure for collective harvesting and medicine making in advance?
- What skills are we missing?
- How much of our medicines are dependent on capitalist supply chains?
- What are the revolutionary changes we need in healthcare and herbalism in general?

I would love to hear from people who share these questions and these are conversations I love to host on my *Frontline Herbalism* podcast.

With the coming years of climate chaos, wars over resources, revolutionary movements and struggles to resist colonisers, whether that's resisting the Israeli Occupation Forces, or the Russian state and its Wagner private army, we will

not be short of opportunities to practise herbal medicine and develop it in these contexts.

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## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* **UKRAINE HERBAL SOLIDARITY**

This book is all about herbal medicine and state violence and trying to illuminate different examples from around the world. A big recent project of mine is called Ukraine Herbal Solidarity. I want to emphasise that this article about the project is my own personal reflections and won't necessarily reflect the experiences of other people involved in the project at different points.

I'm very fortunate that I have friends from Ukraine and also my former partner of six and a half years is a Russian anarchist who couldn't live in Russia because of the repression there. We had some workshops and calls with Ukrainian comrades about their feeling that an invasion was impending and because of this I was already a bit more aware than other anarchists in the so-called West of the context on the ground. I've had a long-term relationship with an Anarchist Black Cross group in Ukraine and some prisoner support work over the years. When the invasion started, my desire to organise something felt very personal as well as politically important. Several of my friends from Poland, Ukraine and Belarus were also very heavily engaged in solidarity efforts.

The first anarchist initiative that emerged was called Operation Solidarity. They started coordinating very quickly, it was super grassroots mutual aid work. They were getting donations from around the world, buying supplies and also supporting the first anarchist anti-authoritarian unit that was part of the territorial defence. They were part of the state army, and I know lots of anarchists have different conflicting feelings about that. As people from Ukraine and also people from Russia who'd fled to Ukraine and also people from Belarus who'd fled to Ukraine after the Belarusian uprising in 2020, they felt that resisting the Russian forces was extremely important in terms of keeping people alive who they loved and defending the land. The land in terms of the people, not the 'nation state'.

These anarchist initiatives were triggered quickly, and I was grateful to be more intimately aware of them and able to amplify them on Instagram and so on. It was in communication with Operation Solidarity that friends suggested that some kind of herbal medicine project could be really valuable. They didn't know what exactly at that moment, but they knew me, they knew my organising,

and they were just like, ‘we need it all, just rock and roll.’

### **The first stages**

I remember being sat in a cafe and nervously designing the logo and launching the crowdfunder without any sort of idea how much support it would get. I didn’t know whether the project would receive pushback. Maybe people would see a herbal medicine response to the horrific terror and bombing from Russia as too ‘genteel’. But I decided to take that risk.



The crowdfunder went live, and there was an intention to start a group called Ukraine Herbal Solidarity with a kind of blank space of what that would look like at the beginning. The first use of funds helped me get to Poland, within a week or two of the invasion. I stayed with some comrades there from Warsaw Anarchist Black Cross and they took me and some other comrades on a mini tour with them of the border hotspots, the different places where refugees were crossing.

We visited three different border sites, places like the main train stations where people were coming in on trains from Ukraine as well as where people were travelling in by coach and on foot. There was a lot of grassroots solidarity happening, driving people to places, housing people. All this was weeks before the state caught up and institutionalised many of those structures.

It was really clear from that tour that there wasn’t a need for a medical response. All these medical NGOs, the big ones, had already kicked into action at the border sites. At the train station, there were already paramedics set up from the Polish state and from other groups. It was like a weird circus, somehow, of different aid groups and their banners and their logos and their brands. It was very territorial in terms of who gets space and where. I think for anarchists and grassroots people it was very difficult because they’re used to being the people that organise that support. They’re the ones that organise the support on the Poland-Belarus border point where there isn’t this fanfare of NGOs tripping

over themselves. It was quite intense actually seeing how much organised support there was, which was also great in different ways. It was really clear that a project like the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais, wasn't going to be valuable.

But what was also clear was that people entering Poland were very distressed. There was the need for herbal medicine in terms of distress support, nervous system support, immune support amongst other health needs. This was also at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic was in full swing as well.

We decided that offering herbal medicine to people on the move was the most strategic thing we could do. We also had several conversations about distributing in Ukraine itself and weighed up the benefits of supporting refugees versus supporting people in Ukraine. And in that moment the decision was that it was much better to focus on the refugees because it was safer for people. The defence forces weren't very organised (yet), people weren't mobilised (yet) and the massacres that would soon take place in Bucha and so on hadn't happened. It was really the first few weeks and quite a small territorial area of people that had been affected. There wasn't the infrastructure to get medicines to people easily. So we made the decision to focus on the thousands of people fleeing.

We were super grateful to be put in contact with a self-organised location outside the Polish city of Lublin which was basically a service station with a petrol station, a garage, McDonald's, stuff like this. Locals, without the state, had organised infrastructure. They had an amazing tent with toys for children. They had clothes, they had some basic medicines like paracetamol. They had hygiene products, some food vans, some SIM card vans. And that was it. It was very grassroots. They told us we could have a tent there and then it was all systems go.

We could clearly distribute from this location. Coaches of refugees were coming from the three different border crossings and gathering there. There were often fifty coaches a day, each with fifty people on them at least so we were able to reach hundreds of people without going anywhere. We'd found the ideal place to distribute medicine.

### **Howling for our pack**

We didn't have an established group by any means so next we had to build our team. We put a call out online and had fifty or so people contact the email address, saying they wanted to get involved, they wanted to donate medicine or come to Poland. We set up slack (an online group communication tool) where

we could communicate. Some of us already knew each other from Calais or from previous projects, but a lot of people were completely new to each other.

I think it's worth naming that eventually the group whittled down to just a couple of us and one of the people who did vast amounts of work was someone called Lana Kouchnir, who is from Ukraine and had emigrated to Canada. She identifies as a witch and she's very active in Ukrainian folklore and magic and history and anti-colonial struggle there. She really taught me so much about the hundreds of years of colonialism from Russia. She isn't a medical herbalist in the conventional sense that people in the UK are, but she's very passionate about herbal medicine and had a really intimate understanding of which herbs people have a cultural relationship with in Ukraine, which was really important for us.

There were a couple of other Ukrainians involved at the beginning as well, but they had to move back to Canada with their families that had fled from Ukraine. So they kind of dropped out once they were no longer in Poland.

## **The herbs**

Once we had our team and designs, we had to decide on our recipes – which herbs to use and what we were going to make. The herbs that we settled on included tinctures for distress and sleep. Valerian tincture (*Valeriana officinalis*) was a big one. Valerian sold out in Ukraine on day three of the invasion: it's a super well-known plant. People were coming up to the clinic and bursting into tears seeing valerian because it's so familiar. It's used as a nervous system relaxant and sedative.

We had skullcap tincture too (*Scutellaria lateriflora*). Skullcap is less used in Ukraine, but it does grow there and people who are a bit more interested in herbal medicine will use it. It's fantastic for nervous system support. We also had hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), which is very widely used in Ukraine. And rose tincture (*Rosa spp.*).

We had various tinctures available, and we also made some different tea packs. We had tea to support the nervous system, which was a blend of chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), and lime flowers (*Tilia cordata*).

We had a nutritive tea blend of nettle (*Urtica dioica*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), oat straw (*Avena sativa*), and raspberry leaf (*Rubus idaeus*) which was really popular. These are all herbs that are culturally familiar in Ukraine.



I also made elderberry syrup (*Sambucus nigra*), because of the Covid context of coughs and colds. We had a muscle ointment with comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*), arnica (*Arnica montana*), St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) infused oils with lavender and wintergreen essential oil (see the recipe in the *Calais Recipes* section). It's a recipe that helps people with sprains, strains and muscle pain, which was common for people we were seeing who had escaped from burning buildings, for example, or from being on coaches for sometimes twenty-four hours, driving straight from eastern Ukraine. People were really appreciative of pain relief, and obviously lots of people who were being evacuated were elderly, so they also valued support for arthritis and joint pain.

We made an infused lavender oil to support with sleep. Not everyone can take medicine internally - if they're pregnant, for example - so we wanted something that was generically safe for people. And we made an immune tonic, which combined elderberry tincture and echinacea tincture, as well as turmeric, ginger and thyme glycerites (see the recipe in the *Calais Recipes* section).

Unlike in Calais, where we're working with a mostly Muslim population who mostly can't take alcohol, in Ukraine, people largely can have alcohol-based medicines. That meant that we could get tinctures donated from companies and from different people and it meant that our immune tonic was especially pokey and delicious.

## Distributing medicines

We tried to narrow down our medicine to this certain number of different medicines and we just were dedicated to making them *en masse*. I worked out that we distributed 17,000 medicines over about nine months. It involved two





very long drives to Poland in my van, taking medicines and also one trip using ‘punk post’: getting it to another van of a comrade in France who then drove it to Poland.

The peak time of the project was when we were distributing in Lublin. Lana travelled over from Canada and committed to stay for several months, which was amazing for the project because it meant that I could go home and also because she speaks fluent Russian. Unfortunately, she doesn’t speak Ukrainian because of colonialism in Ukraine where many people in the population speak Russian and not Ukrainian. But we did have another Ukrainian come and volunteer with her who could speak Ukrainian.

I was there for a week before Lana arrived with a friend from Belarus who was translating for me. In that week alone, I almost distributed everything I brought with me. We were standing in a soggy car park, and it was winter - at the beginning, and then it got warmer. Coaches were pulling in for twenty minutes, and everyone under the sun was getting off the coach: people with disabilities, elderly people, families and children.

We would see them literally only have the possessions that they had brought with them. Many people were only able to flee with their handbag, for example. And people were carrying all kinds of very cute animals like cats and little dogs in their handbags and stuff, which was adorable.

People were generally in quite an acute state of shock. It was very visible. Some people struggled to talk, and some people were extremely emotional. Our stand had translated posters with pictures of the plants, and we had medicines on display and traditional tablecloths from Ukraine. People would see valerian and they would just start weeping or shaking and telling me how much they need valerian and then taking several bottles worth. Some told us they couldn’t believe that some herbalists had come all the way from England with medicine for them.

Unlike the UK for example, people in Ukraine have a really strong relationship to plant medicines. It’s super common and not just a ‘hippie dippy’ niche thing with a lot of prejudice. Everyone knows that you take valerian or have chamomile tea for sleep. It’s just how plant medicine should be – it really is the people’s medicine.

So when people are seeing the medicines that they’re familiar with, they’re obviously having these embodied responses, ancestral responses, from their relationships to these plants. It was a very sacred honour to be in that position to hear people’s stories. One woman told me how she had a rosebush in her garden

and every year she and her husband would make rose tincture from these roses. She just started weeping, talking about how special roses were for her and her husband.

They have conscription in Ukraine, so the men were not allowed to leave unless they have three or more children. There are some exceptions, but a lot of the women were completely heartbroken and devastated to leave their partners in Ukraine. And some people I'd met had already lost husbands, brothers, sons, and family members already due to shelling and other things. I did actually meet a couple of men who weren't Ukrainian nationals, so they were able to leave. They were people of colour and they talked about escaping from burning buildings and things like this and they still had scar tissue from the burns. I gave them some lavender oil, and obviously they knew they had to seek health care at their final destination.

It was quite an intense week of just meeting person after person with story after story. People were in such intense grief and such intense shock. There were a lot of people in the population that just weren't expecting it to ever really happen. And some people came from certain regions that have already seen intense violence since 2014. It was very triggering for them to be back in survival mode.

It was intense to see so many refugees and also to see their beautiful intimate relationship with plant medicines. The children would go to the children's tent opposite our tent, and they were allowed to choose one cuddly toy. We knew that was all that kid had.

People told us they felt so grateful for the displays of solidarity, and I didn't always know if they were moved because it was the plants or because their hearts really needed that grief medicine. It was a very life-changing experience for me. It was just very intense.

When Lana arrived and took over, I was super grateful that she could run that space for several months. It was very traumatising for her listening to these stories over and over again and holding so much space for different people and their emotional distress and their grief. She did an incredible job.

It wasn't until the local people announced that they were closing the site that we then had to start to think about alternative options for distribution. It was very unfortunate that the local people just couldn't sustain it anymore. They'd been doing it all unpaid for several months in a row, the guy who owned the service station wanted it back and so on. Also the volume of people moving wasn't the same as it was at the beginning and the state had caught up with



providing infrastructure for people. So in a way, there was a natural shift.

When the site was closed we then moved operations to Warsaw, and there was a reception centre where refugees were arriving near the bus station, and Lana was able to distribute there for a short amount of time. Unfortunately, one of the NGOs, a Norwegian one, not Polish or Ukrainian, told Lana that she wasn't allowed to distribute there because of their prejudice against herbal medicine. They didn't care that Lana was Ukrainian or that everyone that came to receive medicine loved it. They just said no, this isn't an essential service, you have to leave.

So we focused operations on getting medicines into Ukraine. We partnered with organisations including a queer NGO called Insight. We donated medicine to Operation Solidarity, which by this point had splintered and become Solidarity Collectives. Basically, we started getting medicines to the front in Ukraine, so we worked with different collectives to distribute to the villagers who hadn't evacuated, who were living literally in the war zone.

We also got medicines to people in the territorial defence forces, including anarchist units which had changed over the course of the invasion. We still have medicines in a warehouse that are occasionally being packaged and distributed, but unfortunately, Lana had to return to Canada for economic and personal reasons.

Once we were distributing in Ukraine we also had to make changes to the medicines. We needed things that were very well labelled, that were not politically branded, that were just able to be transported across borders.

## **Herbal safety**

The other important part of the project was making sure we had high quality labels and that we had the information leaflets translated into Ukrainian, Russian, English and Polish because we needed what we were distributing to be safely understood by different people. We had one A4 information leaflet that had every single medicine and information about the herbal properties and the Latin name because of translation differences with folk names. We also had a herbal safety sheet.

We made sure that we were distributing low risk plants, no herbs that could be used for abortions or things like that and if there was a risk, we made sure people knew that valerian can be sedating, so they shouldn't operate heavy machinery, or that they had to be cautious driving with skullcap or combining it with barbiturates. We produced those resources alongside the clinic and it meant that that person had a leaflet with our website on and a phone number so if they had any questions, they had someone to go to.

## **Sustainability**

The massive challenge for us and all the groups organising solidarity is that the support massively reduced and the donations stopped. People became normalised to the violence of the invasion and everything that had happened. People started to politically critique involvement in a state army. People could see the racism around how white Ukrainian refugees were given instant visas (although there's actually lots of people of colour in Ukraine. It's one of the most racially diverse countries; something that people don't realise) compared to people from Sudan, Eritrea, Afghanistan who are having to live in horrific conditions in Calais, getting brutalised and drowning in the Channel.

Solidarity shifted as well. Russian propaganda influenced different people and the fact that the US and the UK states support Ukraine and NATO supports Ukraine, I think it all meant that more grassroots movements didn't feel this same need to support Ukraine somehow.

I would love to work with more people that are making medicine to get to the front lines, but now we have all these challenges. Last year, there were constant drivers going to Ukraine and Poland and now the cost of getting from the UK to Poland is super expensive and if you're not getting enough donations, then it's not sustainable. Is it sustainable to make medicine in England to send all the way to Ukraine? I don't know.

Donations stopped and it became kind of difficult to sustain. The more philosophical part of me feels that actually sometimes it's okay that projects end, and sometimes it's enough that we got 17,000 medicines out to thousands of refugees. We were in that response moment, we supported those people when they needed it, and things need to change, and different structures need to develop. We can recognise what we achieved in the moment and we can see this as just one example of herbal solidarity. It was valuable and needed and appreciated by people and I think that on its own is really powerful as a lesson even if we never distribute medicine in Ukraine again.

For me, projects should always be needs-led. People are still always leaving Ukraine, but we're at that point now where lots of people are moving back to Ukraine. The defence forces have been successful at not letting Russia take territory.

So actually people are relatively safe in the western regions of Ukraine, however, there have been some missile strikes and people are still living with this massive traumatic situation. But yes, if people were still turning up at that site in Lublin, I know in my heart of hearts I'd still be driving there with tonnes of medicine, and we would have set up some NGO and made it all more official and fundraised consistently. But I think being needs-led you can see that needs also change.

I know groups like Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, are often the first people on the ground setting up infrastructure, firewood or water supplies, things like that. And then they can shift, because communities take over. It was really clear in Poland that local people really took over, and then the state took over from them. If you're a Ukrainian refugee, you can more easily access a doctor in Poland, you can integrate into those state healthcare services. It's really clear that in Calais, it's not the same.

But the needs in Ukraine are still massive, the conditions are still harrowing and difficult. They really bloody are, and it's horrific how normalised we become. I do really respect comrades from Solidarity Collectives and other projects like Radical Aid Force and Good Night Imperial Pride and other projects that are still consistently fundraising, consistently working hard to distribute food and medicine to people in Ukraine. And the anarchists and others who are still there fighting. I think their needs haven't changed and they probably would wish that there was more solidarity.

I think we can acknowledge when we've hit our own personal limits and I think we can acknowledge when the needs have changed and it's obviously great

when those things combine, but if they don't, then, you know, that's hard. We could have paid more attention to burnout as we were such a small team.

I think if you're going to create a massive project based on a lot of labour of two people then it's extremely fragile. That was probably the main lesson I learned. We should have put much more energy into making a much more sustainable group with clear boundaries, with clear guidelines to prevent this kind of power vacuum that happened. I think that's my biggest regret, to be honest.

Many of the most successful solidarity projects are based in Germany and Poland and regularly travel into Ukraine. For us with our Calais Clinic, being in the UK and delivering in Calais, it's just half an hour across the channel on the Eurotunnel. We can make medicine, we can drive there, it's pretty sustainable. But driving to Poland, that's a thousand miles each way. I did really consider, at several points, moving to Poland and 'setting up shop there', so to speak, but the problem in Poland is that it doesn't have the same herbal medicine context as the UK. There weren't the same experienced medicine makers who could make things like the cough syrups and the glycerites and things like that. Regulation around medicine is completely different around things like tinctures. We really struggled to find an experienced herbalist. If I'm honest, it was quite challenging and I think it was pretty much inherently always going to be unsustainable having this model of importing medicine from the UK.



For other projects distributing solidarity things, for example if you're buying tourniquets and bandages and things, you can order them anywhere and get them distributed. But for us, it isn't possible to easily buy a thousand tincture bottles affordably.

I think there were lots of patterns that made the project unsustainable, like Lana doing the mainstay of the emotional work of holding emotional space for refugees, me making medicine in the UK, the vast distances in between that probably meant that it was okay as an instantaneous relief effort, but longer term, stuff would have had to really change. We would have had to have done more medicine making trainings in Poland, get the volunteers super confident, get supply chains sorted there, get people growing herbs there. We would have needed to teach people foraging. We would have had to really improve all our operations at every single level to make that something that we could continue indefinitely.

And for me having such massive responsibilities with the clinic in Calais and all my other prisoner support and Solidarity Apothecary projects, it just wasn't something that I could do. We kind of had to admit defeat, unfortunately. I had a lot of grief and a sensation of failure somehow around it all ending. But I think now I've had a bit of time and space from it, I just honour and celebrate how much work was done by very few people and what can be achieved with a bit of political ambition, a crowdfunder, and a van full of medicine! I am proud of what we achieved and if comrades in Poland felt inspired and enthusiastic to restart something, I would be stoked to come and do training there and support people to organise more consistent support. We had a lot of feedback from people at the front in Ukraine about how fantastic things like the immune tonic and the cough syrup were.

### **Final reflections**

Overall, with acceptance of limits, I think we did an incredible job at distributing medicines *en masse* to people in need. In terms of preparing for future similar situations, for example, the coming decades of climate chaos, my personal opinion is that pre-emptive infrastructure is critical. This means practical skills and infrastructure, such as herb growing and medicine making skills and spaces. But it also means majorly investing in relationships. The key is ongoing relationship building.

My previous main work for example was developing a workers co-operative in my area called Feed Avalon that was focused on community food production



and developing food autonomy locally. Over six years, many relationships had been built. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the community kitchen was already organised, the infrastructure was there, making meals for loads of people. They're still doing it, it's not burnt out, it hasn't ballooned and then deflated, it's just consistent. This is similar to anti-repression work in Bristol. With the repression in Bristol after the Kill the Bill demonstration in March 2021, we already had existing infrastructure with Bristol Defendant Solidarity and Bristol Anarchist Black Cross so the groups could swing into action. They had already organised together.

All the tiring decision making, and collective care, and accounting, and expenses policies and training policies, all of this stuff was already established, which meant that the collectives were ten steps ahead with that repression. During the riots that happened in London in 2011, on the other hand, there wasn't any anti repression infrastructure - people were just getting sent down. So I think with this project, Operation Solidarity, which then became Solidarity Collectives, there were already existing contacts in Ukraine from various pieces of anarchist infrastructure, like Anarchist Black Cross Kyiv, for example, who could swing into action and use their existing relationships.

Those are the groups that have survived because they have strong relationships. It's like the energy put into developing the soil food web, right? It's not sexy. You've composted for a couple of years in a row, and now that soil is full of microorganisms, so it's much more resilient to drought or flooding or whatever.

I think maybe with the Ukraine invasion, a lot of solidarity infrastructure wasn't there because we haven't contended with something of this scale. Being at the train station in Poland felt like a Second World War movie - just thousands of people with suitcases and nowhere to go. It was somehow shocking, but the groups that instantaneously organised were the No Borders Poland people who'd been supporting refugees for two years on the border with Belarus.

I think the answer is to constantly build infrastructure and relationships. Look how amazing the queer community was at mobilising safe houses for trans women and other people at the start of the invasion. That's because we've got these existing relationships and infrastructure which need to be developed consistently. We can't take them for granted.

If I was to start a herbal medicine project in my local community, with homeless people for example, I would probably be very intentional and slow about it. I would plan and I would check the relationship ecology. In the case



of Ukraine Herbal Solidarity, there wasn't time for that. Everything was urgent and fast. We were distributing within three weeks of the invasion starting. We were out there in a tent with all the medicine, right from the get-go which is amazing. I think that kind of urgency is also difficult though. It's really called out by people that are trying to address white supremacy, for example, because whiteness perpetuates this feeling of scarcity and urgency. Everything has to be fast, and we have to prioritise the output rather than the relationships.

In hindsight, I wish I'd had a bit more gentle wisdom to slow down and prioritise group principles, but I also know in myself that I have a tendency to work unsustainably, to organise in a centralised way. I work too fast sometimes, and I tend to prioritise output over relationships, especially because of PTSD and finding relational organising very difficult and draining. In Calais I can be super consistent and long-term oriented, but I know my tendencies. I have a sense of personal reflection of my own vulnerabilities or weak spots that were amplified by this project, as well as my strengths.

In general, we needed more people with their eyes on the group. How is the group doing? How are we making decisions? What's the balance of power like? I think every group needs a balance of skills. This is something I share in the top tips section about starting a Mobile Herbal Clinic.

In conclusion, knowing that a project is only going to be short-term can be a strength and not a weakness. Not everything we create has to last forever or develop into a long-term project. We can be responsive, needs-led and shift and change what we are doing in relation to what we are witnessing and experiencing. This is the power of grassroots movements, being very agile and adaptive. I will never forget the people I met who were leaving Ukraine at that moment. I have been very inspired by the resistance of the people and the defiance of Russian colonialism. Solidarity is still needed now as much as ever before and I will include some resources where people can continue to donate and support initiatives on the ground.

## *Herbal Solidarity in Practice:* **LAVENDER OIL IN SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE**

You will see through the book in various examples of herbal solidarity packs that one of the items regularly included is lavender oil. This is something I've been making for several years which is always incredibly well received. Lavender is one of the most amazing herbs at supporting us to almost instantaneously move into a more parasympathetic nervous system state. I detail more of its qualities in the Plant Allies section of this book. I adore lavender oil because it's accessible without people having to eat or ingest it like a tincture or glycerite. We can rub the oil on our aching shoulders or muscles - even a gentle dab on the temples can help me drift off to sleep. We've distributed it with our clinic in Calais for several years - people love that it's from Palestine, they can't believe after weeks of sleepless nights that they have finally been able to sleep regularly even in a tent in a camp. I've distributed it to many people going through court cases who have said the same, it's like everyone is somehow surprised by how much it helps!

The most recent offering of lavender oil was to a Palestinian friend in London at the beginning of the most recent iteration of genocide in Gaza. At this moment I was still suffering from hyperemesis gravidarum (severe vomiting and nausea in pregnancy). There was little I could do in the way of medicine making or even much solidarity organising beyond what I was trying to do from my sick bed. I texted my friend to check in and asked her if she'd like some oil (she'd received some before). She said yes and I managed to get a handful of bottles to her for herself and some Palestinian friends. They shared space together to work with their ongoing grief of being part of the diaspora while their people and lands were being murdered by the Israeli state. They covered themselves in the oil and it moved them to tears. Sometimes herbs can bring release for everything we are holding, which for these friends is beyond my imagination.

### **About the Olive Oil**

The oil we have used is Palestinian olive oil from the Zaytoun farmers cooperative in the West Bank.

In Palestine, it's not uncommon to find olive trees that are hundreds of years old that have been tended and harvested by the same family for generations. Their wide trunks and gnarly bark is a symbol of village life, and of people's connection to the land.

These trees are regularly uprooted or bulldozed, as the communities who have tended them are ethnically cleansed. Hundreds of thousands of trees have been uprooted to make way for the Israeli state's apartheid wall. Those trees that have not been uprooted are from the Palestinian communities who tended them separated by the wall. In the West Bank village of Bil'in, for example, when the wall went up, the community was separated from their olive groves. The people of Bil'in rose up in a popular struggle against the tear gas and bullets of the Israeli army. It was a fight that regained them some of their olive groves, but which lost them several of their comrades.

During British colonial rule in Palestine the mandate authorities relied on an Ottoman law which allows land that the owner hasn't set foot on for three years to be expropriated by the state. The Israeli military uses this law today, preventing Palestinians from accessing their olive groves so that the state can confiscate them as absentee property.

Every year, at olive harvest time, Palestinian farmers have to disobey the military in order to reach their trees. Defying 'closed military zone' orders intended to keep them away from their land. This type of resistance, the refusal to leave their lands in the face of Israeli state colonialism, is called being 'Samud' – or 'steadfast'. Another phrase that is often used to describe the everyday anti-colonial resistance of Palestinians is 'To exist is to resist'.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine is an economic one as well as a military one. And Palestinian farmers usually have no option to export their goods apart from through the same Israeli export companies that are profiting from Israel's colonial policies. That's why solidarity projects like Zaytoun are so important, they open up new ways for people outside Palestine to support the resistance of Palestinian farmers, and to build a solidarity economy rather than a colonial one.

To learn more about Zaytoun visit: <https://zaytoun.uk/>



## *Remedies & Recipes*

### LAVENDER OIL

#### **What you need:**

Dried organic lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

Olive oil - I use Zaytoun from the West Bank, Palestine. Wholesale rates are available if you're making *en masse* - <https://zaytoun.uk/>

- A blender
- Vodka
- Bowls
- Mixing spoon
- Measuring jug
- Scales
- Jar
- Muslin Cloths
- Colander
- Labels & Pen
- Spray bottles/smaller bottles



We work with a ratio of 1:7 powder to olive oil so prepare for whatever quantities you have available to make the oil with.

#### **Instructions:**

1. Use a blender to blend dried lavender flowers into a powder
2. Put the powder in a bowl
3. Add a small dash of vodka into the powder to help 'rehydrate' it and act as a preservative, mix that in with a spoon. You should instantly be able to receive a



stronger lavender scent!

4. Weigh your powder

5. Measure your olive oil in a measuring jug. We need 1:7 powder to olive oil  
e.g 100g of lavender to 700ml olive oil

6. Add your oil to the powder and mix well. Use the blender if needed.

7. Put the mix into a jar and label

8. Leave to infuse for at least 48 hours, I find about 4-5 days makes the perfect strength

9. You can keep returning to the oil and using a stick blender to 'warm it up' to optimise oil strength

10. When ready, strain the oil through muslin

11. Bottle and label



*Contribution:*  
**HERBAL REMEDIES ROOTED IN ANCESTRAL  
ARMENIAN PRACTICES**

*Palig*

Artsakh was an ancient and ancestral Armenian land. It was a region liberated in 1994 from Azerbaijan in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. The ethnically Armenian majority that inhabited these lands wanted to be unified with Armenia and had endured a history of resisting state violence and oppression under the Azerbaijan government. While the first war resulted in a victory for Armenians, Artsakh was never fully recognized by the international community and essentially existed as a semi-autonomous territory. Over the three decades of its freedom, there were constant ceasefire violations initiated by Azerbaijan and in 2020, the ‘44 day’ war took place with Turkey’s support that ultimately led to its dissolution. Under a Russian brokered cease-fire, Artsakhs residents were subjected to a year long blockade and then shelled which forced an exodus out of their homes. This recent loss is yet another footnote in the long list of our people’s displacement, loss of ancestral lands, destruction of security and genocide.

Reclaiming our relationship with the land that we have been robbed of can be a small relief to the burden of resistance and healing that we shoulder.

Medieval and folk Armenian medicine venerated the following herbs for their merits to alleviate spiritual and physical suffering. Alongside each herb, I have included the methods they used when the source material referenced it along with a recommended practice.

**1. Cinnamon** was consumed both in it’s dry form as well as in tea to help counter nausea, forgetfulness and sharpen the mind. Armenians specifically identified cinnamon oil as beneficial to nervous agitation/trembling, and for dealing with drastic change. They prescribed 3 grams of it to be consumed a day. Try putting cinnamon powder in your coffee, brewing cinnamon tea or simmering cinnamon sticks in grapeseed oil over the stove at a low heat for 2 hours. Strain the oil and apply to your pressure points.

**2. Parsley** was consumed to help alleviate fear, headaches, migraines, and nausea. Armenians would consume parsley infused honey or crush its seeds into oil. Armenians specifically identified parsley seeds as being beneficial to strengthening ‘**ներգործութիւն**’ (*nerkordzoutyoun*) which can otherwise be understood as our internal energy, drive or will. They prescribed 2.5 grams of parsley seeds at a time. Try brewing parsley seed tea or creating parsley infused honey by placing dry parsley into a jar of honey (1:2 ratio) and letting it sit for a week, then add it to your tea.

**3. Jasmine petals** were used to make oil to treat bone pain and rashes but the power of this flower was rooted in its scent. Armenians believed that breathing in the aroma of jasmine would help clear a troubled mind and even treat paralysis. Try sourcing jasmine essential oil for aromatherapy, or bringing a large pot of water mixed with jasmine petals to a low simmer and allow for the steam to fill up your space.

**4. Lemon Balm** was believed to help clear and sharpen a mind in turmoil. Its consumption was recommended for digestive support and to strengthen the liver. Our ancestors most notably isolated lemon balm for its spiritual and energetic power. They would dry its leaves, seeds and roots and wrap them into a silk pouch to be carried as a totem for good fortune and bliss. Try brewing lemon balm tea before bed, or I deeply recommend honoring their practices by carrying a little bit in your pocket.

**5. Burdock Root** was a favorite of our ancestors when it came to treating inflammation, pain, wounds and burns. They would make tinctures using alcohol and its roots to treat internal pain as well as topically to relieve swelling. Inflammation, heat and anger have a deep relationship with one another. If you're feeling frustration, prepare a tea blend of cloves and burdock root - a favored pairing by our ancestors.

**6. Armenian Bole** (Red Clay) is not typically thought of outside the realm of skin ailments but Armenians believed that topical application of this indigenous dirt could help with ailments ranging from depression to enlarged spleens, animal bites and poisoning. They favored mixing it with turmeric powder to help reduce inflammation, or blending it with centaurium and honeysuckle



as a topical poultice for wounds. Try sourcing Moroccan red clay as a close substitute and mixing ground turmeric or honeysuckle and apply as a mask.

**7. Nettle** cannot be overstated in its importance, or its benefits in the eyes of our people. Nettle leaves and seeds were prepared in tea, as fresh poultices, cooked as side dishes to help treat congestion, cough, circulation, and menstruation to name a few. Relevant to this topic, they believed that honey infused nettle that is consumed can help slow down and calm erratic breathing. Remember that fresh nettle stings due to its formic acid content. Try a preparation of nettle tea as a calming agent, or creating nettle infused honey by placing dry nettle into a jar of honey (1:2 ratio) and letting it sit for a week.



*Thyme*

**8. Thyme** was used both topically for bites and swelling, as well as consumed for digestive support and nausea. Notably, our ancestors would mix thyme with vinegar and spread this over their forehead to help sort through mental fog. Fresh poultices were also prepared and applied to the forehead to help relieve headaches. While one can adopt the same practices, burning thyme to inhale the aroma can be a good substitute. Thyme oil can also be prepared by infusing thyme in grapeseed oil and simmering for a few hours in a pot. Strain the oil and apply to temples.

**9. Chamomile** was another herb our Ancestors relied on heavily. It was infused in oil and used to treat ear pain, inflammation, circulation, dehydration and as an emolient. Armenians would bathe in chamomile to bring about sleep and relaxation. They would prepare a poultice with its dried leaves and flowers and apply to different parts of the body to relieve pain. Try adding chamomile to a tea bag and placing in your shower to honor their practices. Alternatively, break apart chamomile flowers in a shallow dish and add hot water to create a thick consistency, wrap within cheese cloth and apply to chest or forehead.



**10. Mugwort** is an unassuming roadside herb that our ancestors relied on for most ailments. It was believed to counteract stroke, sciatica, tumors and swelling. Most relevant here, it was believed that smoking mugwort would help relieve anesthesia or numbness, and that mugwort infused honey would help relieve stress and heavy headedness. Try using mugwort to center. Infusing it within honey for tea or burning a dried bundle in your space can be a beneficial and clearing ritual.

**Lavender** was also widely used in Ancestral Armenia. I omitted it here due to its established popularity in the realm of herbal medicine. It was believed to strengthen feelings, clear the head and uplift the mood when consumed with honey. Please know some herbs may counteract medication or increase specific risks so please consult a medical professional if you have any concerns.

*Palig is an amateur herbalist focusing on reclaiming Ancestral Armenian folk medicinal practices. Armmad encompasses her initiative of revitalising relationships with herbs and plants while bringing awareness to the rich history that was lost due to displacement.*

[www.armmad.com](http://www.armmad.com)

*To learn more about Artsakh in a decolonised lens, this website provides a free online library learnforartsakh - <https://sites.google.com/view/learnforartsakh/library>*

# PART 7: PLANT ALLIES

## INTRODUCTION TO PLANT ALLIES

This section of the book shares some detailed profiles of plants mentioned throughout the book. These are primarily nervines - herbs with an affinity for the nervous system. Please see the '*Herbalism and trauma recovery*' section to learn more about the different kinds of nervines.

I wanted to share about these herbs in more depth because they are such a cornerstone of my apothecary in serving people experiencing state violence. They are also generally accessible herbs in terms of cultivation or foraging in my particular bioregion. This may not be the case for everyone reading this book and I always encourage people to build relationships with plants growing around them and those from their lineages.

### About the Plant Profiles

Before you dive into the plant profiles, I wanted to share a bit more detail about each of the sections to help you make the most of the profiles and what they mean. Some of this text has been re-used from *The Prisoner's Herbal* which also contains ten different in-depth plant profiles of common herbs found in prison.

**Botanical latin names:** Plants, like many things within the context of a Eurocentric, colonial history, have been through a process of classification, come to be called taxonomy. This modern system of naming plants and animals was formalised by Carl Linnaeus, an 18th Century Swedish botanist, physician, and zoologist. This classification occupies a complicated territory — it is part of the naming, controlling, ordering and theft that happened under white colonial expansion, and it has some use in terms of creating a common language for patterns and identification.

Botanical names can be useful because it means people from all over the world can communicate about a plant and know they are talking about the same one. There are so many folk names for plants in all different regions and using botanical names helps us to classify certain plants. Latin is often used for botanical names because it is a 'dead' language that is no longer changing. Though at times cumbersome, botanical names can also hold useful information

- sharing glimpses into medicinal attributes. Motherwort, for example, has the botanical name of *Leonurus cardiaca* and cardiac means relating to the heart.

This scientific classification gives the genus and then species name in Latin i.e. *Achillea millefolium*. We often know plants more by their common or folk names, in this case, Yarrow. All the names for the plants, scientific and folk, can be a source of information about the plants' use. Comfrey, for example, whose folk name is Knitbone can be used to heal fractures and bone breaks. Coltsfoot, a lung herb, grows in the shape of a colt's foot and its botanical name, *Tussilago farfara*, means cough dispeller.

**Plant family:** Classification of groups of plants into 'families' can sometimes tell us about the nutritional and medicinal actions of the herbs that are classified together. It can also help with identifying plants we are unsure about as we may recognise certain family characteristics.

**Identification:** Under identification, I've included a botanical description of the plant's distinguishing characteristics.

**Other species:** I sometimes detail other species that are similar. These are listed because you might be in a region with different species of similar plants that share similar properties. Knowing the plant families and similar species can give us clues to the properties of plants we might encounter.

**Ecological role:** I always like to include notes on the ecological role that plants play because it helps me to be less anthropocentric (human-focused) and remember that plants are there also for the birds and the bees and to help the soil in different ways, amongst other reasons. Knowing where to find a plant also really helps - for example, knowing that daisies prefer shortly cut lawns means this is where we will start our search.

**Herbal actions:** This list is the medical community's understanding of how herbs work. They can give us an understanding of the wide range of actions the plants can have in the body. There is a glossary at the back of the book that explains what these actions mean.

**Chemistry:** I know these can look like a list of long geeky words. Constituents are some of the chemicals and compounds found in certain plants, they can help us understand how plants work medicinally. I find the world of plant chemistry incredibly fascinating.

## **Energetics**

**Temperature:** All plants have a different action upon the temperature in

the body. Some are very cooling, and taking them may make us feel colder - if, for example, we have very hot inflammation on our skin, we might appreciate this cooling action. Others can be very warming - if we are sick with a bad cold and have the 'chills', a warming herb might be exactly what we need. Knowing the temperature of a plant's medicinal actions can help us make a decision about whether it will help us or not. Being cold and then taking even more cooling herbs, for example, might not be a good idea.

**Moisture:** Herbs can also have different effects on our bodies in terms of moisture. Some plants may be very drying - they can work to make us sweat or pee more (these plants are known as diuretics) and they have an overall drying effect on our bodies. Others can be very moistening. If we have dry or hard stools and tense constipation, certain plants can help 'lube' us up bringing more moisture to the tissues. Or if we have a dry hacking cough, we want something silky and smooth to soothe our mucous membranes.

**Tissue state:** Tissue states are a whole world of learning in herbal medicine. I have included links to some books on the subject for reference purposes in case people would like to learn more. In summary, there are different ways that tissues in our bodies experience illness and that the tissue states indicate certain excesses or deficiencies. The list of tissue states in these plant profiles are the tissue states that these plants can be very useful for. For example:

- **Heat/Excitation** - There may be a lot of actual heat, such as a fever, inflammation, or a rash. Or things may be running faster than normal - this would be like agitation or overstimulation (emotionally or physiologically, such as heart palpitations). A herb that is warming can warm up a cold situation or get things that have slowed down moving again. A health situation that has a lot of heat may benefit from a cooling or relaxing herb.
- **Damp/Stagnation** - Imagine a swamp that is damp water hanging around going smelly! This often occurs because the body cannot eliminate fluids or waste products well. It can also lead to inflammation as the body tries to deal with the stuck fluid. Herbs that can stimulate circulation and lymphatic movement can help move things that are stuck or stagnant. Astringent herbs can also be helpful.
- **Damp/Relaxation** - This is where tissue is so relaxed it can no longer hold form or fluids, for example, organ prolapse, varicose veins or a flabby tongue. Similarly it can show up as excess fluid loss like diarrhoea or excessive sweating. This can also create a similarly 'swampy'

environment prone to disease. For this tissue state, herbs that are useful are those that can help tone the tissues. These are often called astringents and their tannin content effectively tightens tissues up. When herbs have damp actions, we call this moistening, or demulcent. Moistening herbs are perfect when you have dried out situations, for softening things that have become hardened, and for feeling dehydrated.

- **Dry/Atrophy** - Think of a desert! Here is where there is a lack of fluids such as water or oil, which longer-term can lead to a lack of function (atrophy). For this tissue state, we'd want oily and demulcent herbs. Sometimes a gentle astringent herb can also help tone tissues to stop more fluids being lost.
- **Cold/Depression** - A sensation of coldness as well as general under activity, for example, constipation, emotional depression, or the immune system being unable to get a fever going to respond to viruses. Herbs recommended for this state will be warming and stimulating.
- **Wind/Tension** - Imagine a guitar string that's wound up too tight. Too much tension can constrict things like the circulation of blood or body fluids, often leading to irritability, muscle tension and spasms. For this state, we want herbs that can relax excess tension.
- **Laxity** - Laxity is when things are too relaxed. Often this comes along with dampness or dryness, because in general, too much relaxation means your water will flow in weird ways. But laxity can show up elsewhere - in muscles that don't get enough movement, or in a mind that just can't hold a train of thought. Even in the immune system when your defences can't keep you from getting sick. Gentle astringents may be appropriate, as well as nutritive herbs.

You can definitely have more than one of these at the same time. Just choose the herbs that address whatever is most uncomfortable, and make adjustments as you go. In the end, herbs share some qualities in common: most have anti-inflammatory actions, most have nutritional benefits, and most herbs can help strengthen your body's innate ability to find balance. So if you can't get exactly what you wish you could, work with what you have!

**Nervine actions:** These are the particular actions of this herb that support the nervous system in different ways. As trauma support is the focus of the book, I have focused on sharing the herb's specific nervine actions in more depth.

**System affinities and other medicinal actions:** Here I share more about the herb's medicinal properties for other systems beyond the nervous system, cardiovascular system affinities for instance. I also briefly share some of the herbs' other medicinal actions. Please note the medicinal properties of these herbs are vast! I encourage you to keep learning about them in more and more depth beyond their nervous system properties.

**Practically working with the plant:** These are my top tips on working with the herb. I present which medicinal formats - tinctures, glycerites and so on - are often most effective (see the medicine making section for an explainer of these different terms).

**Safety considerations:** This is basic safety information about the plant, for example any known contraindications.



*Betony*

# BETONY

**Latin name:** *Betonica officinalis* syn. *Stachys officinalis*

**Plant family:** Lamiaceae (mint family)

**Folk names in English:** Betony, Wood Betony, Purple Betony, Bishopwort, Bishop's wort.

**Identification:** Herbalist Zoe Hawes writes that betony is a perennial plant that grows every spring from a fibrous root system up to 30cm high. It has many short-stalked, round, toothed leaves at its base and a square stem with occasional unstalked leaves. The flowers grow directly from the stem, mainly at the top of the dense flowerhead. They are pinkish-purple and trumpet-shaped, with a flat upper lip and three-lobed lower lip, arising from a green, spiked calyx.

**Other species:** Can be mistaken for marsh woundwort (*Stachys palustris*)

**Ecological roles:** Wood betony mainly grows in meadows and partially shaded ground on the edge of woodland or in hedge banks. It may also be found in open grassland. In my garden I find it growing under the shade of other plants, such as rosemary bushes.

**Herbal actions:** Antispasmodic, astringent, bitter tonic, carminative, emmenagogue, expectorant, nervine trophorestorative, relaxant, sedative, vulnerary.

## Chemistry

- Volatile oils
- Bitter principles - betolide, iridoids
- Tannins - rosmarinic acid, caffeic acid derivatives
- Alkaloids - betonicine, stachydrine
- Flavonoids
- Choline
- Coumarins

## Energetics

- **Temperature:** Cooling (bitter), warming (aromatics)



- **Moisture:** Drying
- **Tissue State:** Dry/Atrophy, Wind/Tension
- **Taste:** Mild bitter

### **Nervine actions**

- Betony has a subtle sedative action, helping ease tension and anxiety
- It is useful for recovery from nervous exhaustion, especially where the liver is indicated (constant stress hormones, environmental demands/pollution etc). It has a trophorestorative effect.
- Relaxant for tension e.g. headaches, hypertension
- Strong affinity with the liver - 'stagnant depression'
- Improves circulation to the head, reducing headaches caused by poor circulation. Also aids memory and concentration.
- Relieves nerve pain in neuralgia and sciatica

*"It is a very precious herb, that is certain"*

- Emperor Augustus from the first century AD (almost 2,000 years ago)

*"Bauhin and the Old English Herbarium commence their list of the uses of betony with a protective influence, keeping safe men's bodies and souls, especially after dark, when nightmares and terrifying visions may arise. The plant protects holy places and sepulchres from such fearful sights. Only Dalechamps cites Musa by name on this aspect of betony, concluding that 'it is holy'. Our other authors, including Dioscorides and Pliny, do not mention the claim, except Grieve, who cites Apelius'. As a remedy for nightmares, it pops up later in Bartram and again in Menzies-Trull."*

- Tobyn, Graeme & Denham, Alison & Whitelegg, Margaret. (2011). *Stachys officinalis*, wood betony. 10.1016/B978-0-443-10344-5.00034-3.

### **Digestive system affinities**

- Betony is mildly bitter making it useful for stimulating secretions of the liver, gallbladder, pancreas, stomach, small and large intestines to aid digestion.
- Betony can also help calm wind, cramps and tension in the digestive tract through its carminative and nervine actions.
- It is useful in gut blends to aid in recovery from intestinal permeability/

leaky gut syndrome due to its astringent tannins.

- Strong liver affinity.
- It has an affinity for gut issues relating to stress, trauma or general nervous-system deficiency through overstimulation of the autonomic nervous system.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Betony's relaxant and antispasmodic action on smooth and skeletal tissue, can make it useful for people with neck and shoulder pain, especially if attributed to stress.
- Betony's cleansing action through the liver and kidneys can make it helpful in arthritis and gout (clearing damp stagnation).
- Wound healing - Betony's gentle astringent and vulnerary action make it useful in first aid for cuts, scrapes and wounds. Fresh leaves can be crushed into a paste or made into a spit poultice to apply to bites. It has a gentle drawing action making it useful for stings and splinters.
- Helpful in respiratory infections due to its astringent, circulatory stimulant, and antimicrobial actions.
- Can help bring on delayed periods and relieve premenstrual tension. Can help astringe heavy periods.
- Betony is used as part of integrative treatments for enlargement of the prostate.

### **Practically working with Betony**

- Fresh or dried herb tincture
- Dried herb tea

### **Safety considerations**

- Betony has a slight stimulant effect on the uterus and is, therefore, contraindicated for pregnant people.
- Do not exceed recommended dose.
- Caution with low blood pressure.
- Caution with blood pressure medications.
- Caution before surgery (ideally stop at least two weeks before).

## CHAMOMILE

**Latin name:** *Chamaemelum nobile* (Roman chamomile), *Matricaria chamomilla* (German Chamomile), *Matricaria discoidea* (Wild chamomile/Pineapple weed)

**Plant family:** Asteraceae (daisy family)

**Folk names in English:** Maythen, Manzanilla, Whig Plant, Ground Apple. The Latin name is derived from the Greek 'khamaelon' meaning 'earth apple'.

**Identification:**

- German chamomile – this is an annual plant that self-seeds. It can grow 10-80cm high. It has white flowers with a yellow disk in the middle surrounded by evenly spaced white florets. It generally flowers in June and July and smells pleasant and sweet.
- Roman chamomile – this is the chamomile which is very low growing at only 6-10cm. It is a perennial. The flowers are smaller than the German chamomile.
- Wild chamomile/Pineapple weed – Low-growing hairless herbs with leaves deeply and intricately cut into very thin lobes, the main lobes divided further into smaller ones (2-pinnate) which themselves can be divided (3-pinnate). It has a strong pineapple smell. The flower heads are 30-45mm across with yellow centres and no white petals.

**Other species:** Corn chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*) has no scent. Scentless chamomile or Sea Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum inodorum*) is found at the seaside.

**Ecological roles:** Chamomile is often found on well-drained soil on waste ground and around field margins. You can find chamomile across Europe and temperate Asia and North Africa, as well as some parts of Australia and Argentina. Chamomile was also used as a strewing herb in the Middle Ages to help keep insects away. They were hung in bundles or placed on the floor and in furniture. Chamomile is commonly grown and imported from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, France, Greece, Hungary and Egypt.

**Herbal actions:** Analgesic, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, anti-parasitic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, calming, carminative, cholagogue, digestive, emmenagogue, febrifuge, hepatic, hypnotic, immuno-stimulant, nerve sedative,

ophthalmic, stomachic, sudorific, tonic, vermifuge, vulnerary.

## Chemistry

German chamomile:

- Terpenoids ( $\alpha$ -bisabolol,  $\alpha$ -bisabolol oxide A and B, chamazulene) sesquiterpenes; coumarins (umbelliferone)
- Flavonoids (luteolin, apigenin, quercetin); patuletin; spiroethers: en-yn dicycloether and
- Tannins, anthemic acid, choline, polysaccharides and phytoestrogens

Roman chamomile:

- Chamazulene, bisabolol
- Flavonoids: quercetin, apigenin, luteolin
- Coumarins: scopoletin-7-glucoside
- Angelic and tiglic acid esters, anthemic acid, fatty acids and choline

## Energetics

- **Temperature:** Cooling
- **Moisture:** Drying
- **Tissue State:** Wind/Tension, Heat/Excitation
- **Taste:** Aromatic, Bitter, Sweet

## Nervine actions

- Hugely underestimated relaxant that can help us switch from a sympathetic to the parasympathetic nervous system state.
- Great for background restlessness and irritability. It can also really help with troubled sleep that is attributed to restlessness.
- Inflammation modulating/Anti-inflammatory.
- Carminative for digestion especially when affected by stress.
- ‘Quieting herb’.

*“Chamomile takes away weariness, eases pains, to what part of the body soever they be applied.”*

- Nicholas Culpepper

### **Digestive system affinities**

- Carminative for indigestion.
- Useful in long-term gut healing due to its inflammation modulating, antimicrobial, vulnerary, carminative actions.
- Volatile oils stimulate the liver and kidneys.
- Bitter actions stimulate the liver to help eliminate excess stress hormones and improve digestion.
- Inflammation modulating and anti-allergenic properties make it helpful in prevention and recovery of hayfever, allergic reactions and harm from food intolerances.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Part of integrative treatment of various skin conditions e.g. eczema, acne rosacea, acne vulgaris, burn recovery.
- Useful for soothing bites and stings.
- Can help with internal and topical fungal infections.
- Useful in treating conjunctivitis.
- Part of integrative treatment of chickenpox and shingles.
- Can be useful in fever care and coughs/colds due to its antimicrobial actions.
- Gentle antispasmodic and emmenagogue making it useful in period pains.
- Very useful for children e.g. teething, earaches.
- Helpful in benzodiazepine withdrawal.

### **Practically working with chamomile**

- Tea/infusion (dried herb)
- Tincture (dried or fresh herb is incredible)
- Glycerite (warm with dried herb)
- Foot baths
- Baths especially with kids
- Inhalation of essential oil
- Chamomile-lavender massage oil
- Chamomile-fennel tea for upset stomach caused by anxiety

### Safety considerations

- Avoid excessive doses during pregnancy.
- Be careful using therapeutic doses in combination with orthodox anticoagulants such as warfarin (contested).
- Caution with central nervous system depressants, such as opiates, alcohol, benzodiazepines, tricyclic antidepressants, anaesthetics, or anti-epileptics.
- Avoid if allergic or sensitive to asteraceae (daisy) family plants.
- Avoid simultaneously taking iron supplements and chamomile due to research suggesting reduced iron absorption.



*Chamomile*

# HAWTHORN

**Latin name:** *Crataegus monogyna*

**Plant family:** Rosaceae (Rose family)

**Folk names in English:** May-tree, Thornapple, May blossom, Bread and Cheese, White thorn, May, Quickset, Hagthorn. Kratus is the Greek word for strong.

**Identification:** Botanist Ben Averis describes hawthorn as a shrub or small tree with brown or red-brown, spiny twigs, small beds (purplish-red-tipped in winter) and small oblong or triangular, deeply lobed leaves whose edges are cut at least halfway to the central vein of the leaf. Clusters of whitish flowers in spring, red berries in autumn.

**Other species:** There are over 200 species of hawthorn worldwide. Common species to note include Midland hawthorn (*C. Laevigata* syn *C. Oxyacantha*) and Chinese Haw (*C. Pinnatifidia*).

**Ecological role:** Hawthorn shrubs and trees can often be found on dry to moist, acid to basic soils forming dense scrub and hedges. They can also be scattered in woods and grasslands.

**Herbal actions:** Antispasmodic, cardiotonic, carminative, diaphoretic, diuretic, nervine, nutritive, sedative (gentle).

## Chemistry

- Saponins
- Glycosides
- Flavonoids - vitexin, vitexin-rhamnoside, quercetin, quercetin-3- galactoside
- Various acids, including ascorbic
- Amines - phenylamine, alpha-methoxyphenylamine, tyramine in flowers
- Tannins
- NB - The flowers and berries are rich in bioflavonoids and the leaves contain high levels of polyphenols, tannins and oligomeric proanthocyanidin (OPCs) which are 20 times more potent than Vitamin C and 50 times more potent than Vitamin E.

## Energetics

- **Temperature:** Cooling
- **Moisture:** Drying (flowers), Moistening-Neutral (Berries)
- **Tissue State:** Heat/Excitation, Dry/Atrophy, Damp/Stagnation
- **Taste:** Berries – sweet and sour; flowers – sweet; leaves – astringent

## Nervine actions

- Hawthorn is a gentle relaxant. It is calming and reduces heat from sympathetic activation e.g. agitation, restlessness, irritability, anger, rage.
- It is also nourishing for underlying ‘background anxiety’/less acute sympathetic activation.
- “Food for the heart” - Hawthorn offers long term heart support.
- *“The nervine quality of Hawthorn is, in part, from the herb’s anthocyanidin content which further relaxes blood cells and improves the ability of the nervous system to deliver messages throughout the body”* - Alexis J. Cunningham
- Primarily used as a cardiac nervine (see below). It also supports the emotional heart and is especially indicated in cases of grief, loss and heartbreak.

## Cardiovascular affinities

- Blood vessel integrity: The high antioxidant content of the leaves and flowers help keep the elasticity of the blood vessels malleable and help prevent arteriosclerosis (the thickening and hardening of the arterial walls).
- The flavonoids protect the vasculature from oxidative stress and damage, improving the elasticity of the arteries.
- Reducing blood pressure: This is from the anthocyanidins in the berries that relax the blood vessels, allowing more blood to move through and thus reducing the pressure.
- Increasing blood pressure (when needed): Paradoxically, hawthorn can also help low blood pressure by tonifying the walls of blood vessels.
- Cholesterol: Hawthorn helps lower low-density lipoprotein and triglycerides in the bloodstream and liver, thus reducing fat in the liver as well as along the walls of the aorta (lowering heart attack risk and hypertension).
- Angina: Hawthorn is useful for angina pectoris, where the chest pain is due to an inadequate supply of oxygen to the heart muscle. This is because it improves coronary circulation (nourishes the heart tissues itself).



- ‘Blood Building’: *“The oligomeric proanthocyanidins has strong vitamin P activity which is largely responsible for the cardiovascular activities. Vitamin P (citrin bioflavonoids) regulate the permeability of blood capillaries and promotes capillary stability when administered with vitamin C”* - Thangavelu, Lakshmi & Geetha, R V & Roy, Anitha. (2012). *Crataegus oxyacantha* Linn. commonly known as Hawthorn-A scientific review. International Journal of PharmTech Research. 4. 458-465.

*“Hawthorn helps the heart open to new possibilities, especially after a period of heartbreak and distress such as after the loss of a loved one whether through death or a break up.”*

- Alexis J. Cunningham

*“As a guardian of the hinge, hawthorn wisely discerns the right timing for the wounded heart to open.”*

- Judith Berger

### **Digestive affinities**

- Considered a digestive in Traditional Chinese Medicine for help to promote digestion and activate blood circulation to dissipate blood stasis.
- Aids the walls of the intestine to help better assimilate fats, nutrients and vitamins.
- It supports the liver to create bile.
- Stimulates gastric juices in the stomach.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Antioxidant for inflammatory connective tissue disorders.
- Benefits the joint linings, synovial fluid, collagen, ligaments, vertebral discs.
- Immune support - the chemical compounds in hawthorn extract may encourage the production of white blood cells.
- Diuretic for fluid retention.
- Can help regulate menstrual flow.
- Antioxidant and circulatory actions can support with macular degeneration and other eye issues.

### **Practically working with Hawthorn**

- Hawthorn berry tincture (fresh)

- Hawthorn berry glycerite (fresh)
- Hawthorn berry glycerite (dried, warm method)
- Hawthorn flower tincture & glycerite (fresh)
- Hawthorn tea (dried)
- Medicines combining both the flowers and the berries are encouraged

### **Safety considerations**

- Caution with blood pressure medications especially hypertensives.
- Avoid in bleeding disorders.
- Caution with central nervous system depressants such as opiates, benzodiazepines, alcohol, anaesthetics, anti-epileptics, or tricyclic antidepressants.
- Caution with oral hypoglycemics, insulin, or vasodilators.



*Hawthorn Flowers*

## LAVENDER

**Latin name:** *Lavandula spp.*

**Plant family:** Lamiaceae (mint family)

**Folk names in English:** Spike, Elf leaf, Nard, Nardus, Garden Lavender, Spike Lavender, Sweet Lavender, True Lavender.

**Identification:** Lavender is a short, bushy shrub that has rough woody branches and grows 60-90 cm tall. The leaves of lavender can be broad or narrow depending on the variety; most are lance-shaped and grey-ish blue and grow directly off the stem. Lavender flowers are very fragrant and grow on slender stalks that reach up above the leaves. Flowers consist of whorls of bright purple flowers that are small and spiky at the top of the stalk.

**Other species:** *L. angustifolia*, *L. vera*, *L. officinalis*, *L. stoechas*

**Ecological role:** Lavender is a wonderful plant for bees and other insects. Its native habitat is dry grassy slopes amongst rocks, in exposed, usually parched, hot rocky situations often on calcareous soils. Lavender also makes a good companion plant in the vegetable garden, especially with the brassica family.

**Herbal actions:** Antibacterial, antioxidant, antispasmodic, analgesic, anticonvulsant, antidepressant, antimicrobial, antiseptic, bronchodilator, carminative, circulatory stimulant, cholagogue, decongestant, digestive, diaphoretic, diuretic, expectorant, nervine, relaxant, rubefacient, sedative, vulnerary.

### **Chemistry:**

- Over 160+ constituents
- Essential oil (up to 3%)
- Aldehydes: 2% (including myrtenal, cuminal, citral, geranial, trans-hexanal)
- Rosmarinic acid
- Esters: 40- 50% (linalyl acetate, lavandulyl acetate, terpenyl acetate, geranyl acetate)
- Flavonoids
- Tannins

- Coumarins/Lactones: herianin, coumarin, ombelliferone, santonin
- Ketones: 4% (camphor, octanone, p-methyl-acetophenone)
- Oxides: 2% (1,8-cineole, linalol oxide, caryophyllene oxide)
- Monoterpenols: linalol, terpin-4 -ol, a -terpineol, borneol, geraniol, lavandulol

## Energetics

- **Temperature:** Cooling
- **Moisture:** Drying
- **Tissue State:** Heat/Excitation, Wind/Tension
- **Taste:** Bitter, pungent, sweet

## Nervine actions

- Lavender is very fast acting in reducing sympathetic activation and moving us into a more parasympathetic state.
- It can help relieve anxiety, especially ‘background’ anxiety that can underpin someone’s day.
- Lavender has a particular affinity for aiding sleep especially in supporting people to fall asleep when restless and have improved sleep quality.
- Lavender not only reduces anxiety but can also enhance mood.
- Strengthening tonic action in states of nervous exhaustion.
- Relieves tension, especially musculoskeletal tension from stress.
- Lavender can support people experiencing headaches and migraines, especially those caused by stress and tension. The infused oil can be rubbed on the temples or massaged around the base of the neck.
- Supportive with agitation in dementia.
- Lavender can trigger a feeling of tranquility, calmness, serenity, stillness, repose (in some people).
- In the *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course I go into detail about research around lavender’s effects on neurotransmitters and receptors including GABA, the NMDA-receptor, SERT the serotonin receptor, H3 receptors and the general limbic system.

*“Is useful for mild depression with difficult thinking, the person may remark that he/she is in a fog. I use it regularly for stagnant depression (the person is fixated on a specific traumatic event)*

*with Damiana, Holy Basil or Rosemary as well as depression in the elderly with impaired sleep.”*

- David Winston

*“Queen of nerve tonics”*

- Kami McBride

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Lavender can be used as part of a liniment to help ease aches and pains of rheumatism.
- It's a fantastic topical skin healer making it useful in the treatment of athlete's foot, rashes, eczema, psoriasis and other skin conditions. The essential oil is antifungal.
- Antiseptic against strep and staph (respiratory, intestinal, biliary, genitourinary, and cutaneous).
- Useful antimicrobial in respiratory tract infections, coughs, colds, chest infections etc.
- Can support with a transient reduction in high blood pressure.
- Lavender is fantastic in burn treatment.
- Lavender was traditionally burned in delivery rooms as a disinfectant and used in baths to aid with postpartum recovery.
- Dental support: Lavender can be used as part of a mouth rinse for post-extraction dental treatments, scalings, fillings and other adjustments. Lavender also combines well with chamomile for teething infants, especially where sleeplessness is an issue.
- Lavender essential oil can be used to repel insects and can relieve insect bites and stings.

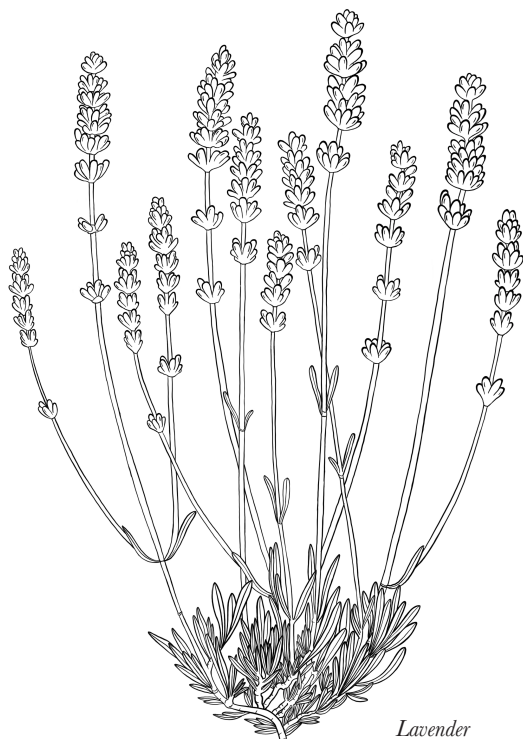
### **Practically working with lavender**

- Lavender essential oil - abundant aromatherapy uses
- Lavender infused oil – rub on temples to help sleep, massage oil
- Lavender tea - especially in blends
- Tea/tincture used in gargles
- Lavender tincture (dried or fresh flowers)
- Lavender aromatic water

- Baths - essential oils, infused oils, dried lavender (especially with epsom salts)
- Lavender vinegar
- Lavender salt for food (with other herbs e.g. rosemary)

### **Safety considerations**

- Some people may display sensitivity to lavender essential oil on the skin. This can often be attributed to low-quality, adulterated oils.
- The essential oil is generally considered as an emmenagogue and should be avoided in large quantities in the first trimester of pregnancy.
- As a hypotensive the oil may cause extreme drowsiness in individuals with low blood pressure.
- Caution should be taken using lavender with prescribed sedative or tranquillising medicines because of its sedative effect.



*Lavender*

# LEMON BALM

**Latin name:** *Melissa officinalis*

**Plant family:** Lamiaceae (Mint family)

**Folk names in English:** Lemon balm, Melissa, Balm, Bee Balm, Sweet Balm, Dropsy Plant, Heart's Delight.

**Identification:** It has square stems and opposite leaves that are slightly heart-shaped and toothed. They grow 5-8 cm long and are very fragrant and lemony tasting. The flowers of lemon balm grow in whorls around the stem and are composed of small white blossoms. The plants are upright and branching, growing 90 - 110cm tall.

**Other species:** Lemon balm can be mistaken for other members of the mint family due to their square stems, however, their strong lemony taste distinguishes them.

**Ecological role:** Lemon balm is an aromatic mint that spreads easily. It is a fantastic understory plant in forest gardens.

**Herbal actions:** Antispasmodic, antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, analgesic, antiviral, carminative, diaphoretic, digestive, nervine, sedative.

## Chemistry

- Rosmarinic acid
- Rich in essential oil containing citral, citronellal, geraniol, linalol
- Essential oil rich in aldehydes, triterpenes, polyphenols
- Phenolic acids - rosmarinic acid, caffeic acid and chlorogenic acid
- Bitter principles
- Flavonoids - quercetin, rhamnocitrin, and luteolin
- Resin
- Tannins

## Energetics

- **Temperature:** Cooling
- **Moisture:** Drying

- **Tissue State:** Heat/excitation, Wind/tension
- **Taste:** Sour

### Nervine actions

- Lemon Balm is a wonderful nervine relaxant. It is strongly indicated where there is excess sympathetic activation and hyperadrenalism. It can support us to move into a more parasympathetic state consistently.
- It is not hypnotic or soporific but can aid with sleep by supporting us to have more time in parasympathetic through the daytime.
- Lemon balm also has a trophorestorative action and can aid in recovery from chronic stress.
- Lemon balm's volatile oils act on the limbic system.
- It has an antispasmodic that is very helpful when we experience anxiety in our guts.
- Can relax tension throughout the vasculature lowering blood pressure.
- Reduces heart palpitations.
- Nootropic action/cognitive enhancer – helps to focus a scattered mind, also improves concentration and memory (partly due to the action on muscarinic and nicotine receptors).
- Lemon balm has a palliative effect on excessive mental activity.
- It not only 'eases sadness', but also lifts spirits and can create a sense of relaxed, calm alertness.
- Good if you are intolerant to valerian but experiencing agitation.
- Mentioned in *De Materia Medica* in about 50–80B.C. Avicenna used *Melissa officinalis* as an exhilarating and antidepressant medication 1000 years ago.

*“To strengthen the brain in its resistance to shock and stress; low spirits, restlessness, fidgety limbs, “cold and miserable”, anxiety, neurosis.”*

- Bartram

*“Melissa is particularly indicated for nervous problems that have arisen from long standing worry and stress; and for anxiety that is accompanied by debility, sluggishness, confusion, and exhaustion. This herb is thought to tone and strengthen an exhausted nervous system, rather than to sedate a hyperactive one – in the manner of many other nervine tonics.”*

- Jillian E. Stansbury, ND



*“The Lemon Balm person tends to be nervous and on edge. Panic attacks are a familiar experience and sometimes seems to be a primary way of engaging any stressful change in their life. Such a constant state of worry and stress can lead to mental fatigue and burnout. Lemon Balm helps to reconnect the heart to the head, and deliver messages of calm when all seems topsy-turvy.”*

- Alexis J. Cunningham

### **Digestive affinities**

- Lemon balm aids nervous system induced digestive distress by relaxing spasms and cramping, increasing circulation and dispelling excessive gas and wind.
- It also has a mild astringent action.
- Relaxes sphincter of Oddi.
- Stimulates flow of digestive enzymes, liver and gallbladder.
- Although the lipid-lowering mechanism of *M. officinalis* is not clearly known, studies have shown that regular and daily drinking of *M. officinalis* tea may improve the metabolic parameters like cholesterol and triglycerides in humans.

### **Cardiovascular affinities**

- Lemon balm has a tonic effect on heart and circulatory system.
- Supports with the lowering of blood pressure.
- Reduces heart palpitations.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Relaxes constriction aiding vascular tension-based headaches and migraines.
- Used in treatment of hyperthyroidism.
- Part of integrative treatment for shingles, Herpes simplex virus.
- Affinity with children, especially with hyperactivity.
- Can be used in acute infections e.g. UTIs, fevers.
- Cooling for hot flashes.
- Part of integrative treatment for burns, blisters, herpetic sores, stings.
- Antiseptic diuretic useful for urinary tract infections.

### **Practically working with Lemon Balm**

- Incredible glycerite (cold)
- Tincture (fresh herb ideally)
- Tea (fresh herb ideally)
- Essential oil used for herpes treatment

### **Safety considerations**

- Avoid in cases of hypothyroidism or if taking thyroid medication.
- Use with caution if taking antidepressant and sedative medications.
- Caution with hypotension. Can lower blood pressure.

## MILKY OATS, OATS & OATSTRAW

**Latin name:** *Avena sativa*

**Plant family:** Poaceae

**Folk names in English:** Milky Oats, Wild Oats, Catgrass, Milky Oat Seed.

**Identification:** An annual, with a smooth stem, attaining a height of between one and one and a half meters, with rough, green, linear-lanceolate leaves. The flowers are arranged in a loose terminal panicle about 15-30 cm long, consisting of two-flowered pendulous spikelets up to 2.5cm long. The seed first forms with a whitish milky mucilaginous fluid that eventually gives way to a hard, grooved grain.

**Other species:** *Avena fatua* is known as ‘common wild oat’. There are 25 other species of oats.

**Ecological roles:** *A. sativa* is cultivated. Wild species such as *A. fatua* are often found in grassy fields, among grains crops as a weedy grass, and in waste areas. Can be grown as a cover crop.

**Herbal actions:** antidiabetic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, anxiolytic, dermatological, demulcent, emollient, hypolipidemic, immunomodulatory, laxative, nervine, nutritive tonic, trophorestorative.

### Chemistry

- Protein
- Vitamins - A, C, E, K. Many B vitamins including B6, folic acid, niacin, ribofavin, thiamine.
- Minerals - calcium, chromium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, silicon, sodium
- Antioxidants - vitamin E, flavonoids, and non flavonoid phenolic acids
- Amino acids - arginine, histandine, leucine, lysine, phenylalanine, tryptophan
- Lipids
- B-glucan
- Avenanthramides

- Indole alkaloid
- Triterpenoidsaponins
- Lipids
- Sterols

### **Energetics**

- **Temperature:** Neutral to warm
- **Moisture:** Moistening
- **Tissue State:** Dry/Atrophy
- **Taste:** Sweet, salty, bland

### **Nervine actions**

- Oats are one of our main allies in supporting recovery from nervous exhaustion due to their trophorestorative action.
- They also have a gentle relaxant action that can support with relieving anxiety and tension.
- They offer support especially when the body is struggling during withdrawal (tobacco, opiates etc).
- Oats offer cognitive support (memory, concentration, focus etc).
- They contain tryptophan and amino acids that have a calming effect on the nervous system.
- They have a strong affinity where blood sugar imbalances are contributing to anxiety.

*“For situational depression in type A, hyperactive people who have become emotionally brittle due to chronic stress, recreational drug use or overwork. Use it along with calming adaptogens.”*

- David Winston

*“May everyone who is exhausted with an empty mind take a steam bath by pouring water wherein oats have been cooked over hot stone. If this treatment is repeated, the patient will get to himself again and regain the capacity of thinking”*

- Hildegard von Bingen (12th century)

### **Cardiovascular affinities**

- Oats have cholesterol lowering properties (consumption of oatmeal).

- Oat consumptions improves the blood pressure when consumed with vitamin C, improved endothelial function and exerted angiotensine converting enzyme inhibition.
- Avenanthramide is an oat polyphenol that has been shown to enhance production of nitric oxide, a potent vasodilator, and to inhibit thickening of vascular smooth muscle.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Soothing to various skin conditions.
- Connective tissue support.
- Oats are good for constipation and calming irritated tissues and inflammatory conditions e.g. inflammatory bowel syndrome, gastritis, diverticulitis.
- Beta glucans improve insulin sensitivity.
- Oats support gut health - they are beneficial to a healthy intestinal ecosystem.
- They also support healing from intestinal permeability.
- Support with lactic acid production.

### **Practically working with oats**

- Eating oats
- Oat straw infusions
- Fresh milky oats tincture
- Fresh milky oats glycerite

### **Safety considerations**

- Caution for celiacs and people with gluten sensitivity



# ROSE

**Latin name:** *Rosa spp.*

**Plant family:** Rosaceae (Rose family)

**Folk names in English:** Rose, Queen of Flowers, Rosa, Satapatri, Witch's briar.

**Identification:** Roses have a climbing habit and prickly stems as in bramble but the stems are rounded in section, so they look smoother (apart from the prickles!). Their leaves are not evergreen, and are divided into 5-7 leaflets which, apart from the end one, are in two rows along the leaf stalk. Large stipules (leaf like structures) are attached to each side of the lower part of the leaf stalk. For wild roses, they have large white or pink flowers in the summer, becoming red 'hips' in the autumn.

**Other species:** There are 13 species of wild rose in Britain and many hundreds of different kinds of domestic cultivars. Wild roses include Field Rose (*R. arvensis*), Sweetbriar or Eglantine (*R. rubiginosa*), Downy rose (*R. tomentosa*). Commonly used medicinal roses include Apothecaries rose (*R. gallica*), Damask rose (*R. damascena*) and Provence rose (*R. centifolia*). Europe's native rose is Dog Rose (*R. canina*).

**Ecological role:** Wild roses can be found on dry to moist soils, especially in lowland woods and hedgerows.

## Herbal actions:

- Rose petals: alterative, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, antiviral, aperient, astringent, nervine, nutritive, tonic
- Rose hips: antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antispasmodic, aperient, astringent, carminative, nutritive, tonic

## Chemistry

- Flavonoids
- Vitamins A, B, C, E, K, and folic acid
- Calcium, potassium, sodium, sulphur, iron

- Saponins
- Rutin
- Quercetin
- Tannins
- Pectin
- Carotene
- Fruit acids
- Fatty oil
- Nicotinamide

### **Energetics**

- **Temperature:** Cooling
- **Moisture:** Moistening
- **Tissue State:** Heat/Excitation, Damp/Relaxation, Cold/Depression
- **Taste:** Bitter, sweet, astringent

### **Nervine actions**

- Rose is cooling and nourishing when you are in a ‘charged’ or activated sympathetic state. They can support us with a gentle ease into a more parasympathetic state of being.
- Rose offers support for blood vessels and general inflammation as a result of sympathetic excess.
- Rose can soothe heart palpitations.
- Rosehips contain vitamin C and other antioxidants that can strengthen capillaries and connective tissue.
- Rose is a significant ‘emotional mover’ and offers support especially for heartache/break, loss, grief and emotional pain.

*“Rose is an excellent heart remedy following shock, trauma, heartbreak and all kinds of depression and anxiety. It cools agitation and restlessness, gives hope and space and helps to drown out dark negative feelings such as suspicion, cynicism, bitterness and anger. Rose brings a feeling of love, wellbeing, peace and happiness”*

- Elisabeth Brooke, the author of *Traditional Western Herbal Medicine*

### **Cardiovascular affinities**

- Its cooling and astringent properties support with inflammation of the blood vessels.
- Reduces high cholesterol levels.
- Alleviates heart palpitations.
- Rose's flavonoids and phenolic acids can improve cardiovascular diseases by relaxing blood vessels, relieving hypertension, and reducing the expression of proinflammatory cytokines.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Immune support (especially rosehips).
- Gargle for sore throat and mouthwash for mouth ulcers and bleeding gums.
- Eyewash for eye inflammation.
- Topical cooling astringent indicated for skin inflammation where there is heat e.g. boils, acne, spots, rashes, sunburn.
- Useful for uterine spasms and cramping.
- Antispasmodic and astringent for stomach cramping and diarrhoea.
- Supports healthy gut flora with its probiotic qualities.
- Supports healthy vaginal flora e.g. adding rose petals to a bath for vaginitis and thrush.
- Gentle bitter action e.g. increases bile flow.
- Antifungal and antibacterial.
- Antimicrobial and decongestant making it useful in chest infections.
- Flowers and seeds are diuretic and antiseptic making rose useful in UTI infections.
- Anti-inflammatory for joint pain e.g. arthritis.

### **Practically working with rose**

- Rose tincture (fresh petals)
- Rose glycerite (cold infusion, fresh petals)
- Rosewater in tea
- Hot chocolate with rosewater or rose petals
- Rose petals in a bath
- Rosehip syrup



## Safety considerations

- Avoid in pregnancy.
- The short hairs in rose hips are dangerous internally and have been added to infamous itching powders used in pranks for generations. It's always best to process rose hips, for example, by boiling and using in syrups and ensuring they are well-strained.



*Dog Rose*

## SKULLCAP

**Latin name:** *Scutellaria lateriflora*, *Scutellaria galericulata* (300+ species worldwide)

**Plant family:** Lamiaceae (mint family)

**Folk names in English:** Please note most of these names are used for different skullcap species, some are also used for completely different plants. Hoodwort, Mad-dog, Madweed, Blue Pimpernel, Helmet Flower. *Scutellaria lateriflora* is also known as Virginian Skullcap and Blue Skullcap. *Scutellaria galericulata* is also known as Marsh Skullcap. ‘Scutella’ in Latin means ‘little dish’ because of how the flowers have a dish-like and helmet-like shape.

**Identification:** *Scutellaria lateriflora* plants are erect and multi-stemmed and grow 30 - 90cm tall from dense rhizomatous mats. Leaves are oval or lance-shaped, opposite and toothed and grow from petioles attached to square stems. Flowers range from white to violet-blue and grow on racemes attached to leaf axils along the length of the stems. Flowers are helmet-like sheaths.

**Other species:** In England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, our native species are *Scutellaria galericulata* and *Scutellaria minor*. Another commonly used medicinal plant with differently used actions is Baikal Skullcap, *Scutellaria baicalensis* that is native to Siberia and Asia. I have tried to use the Latin names to prevent confusion.

**Ecological role:** *Scutellaria lateriflora* is generally found in damp places and meadows. As a wetland-loving species, it can be found in moist, shady, riparian habitats. *Scutellaria galericulata* can also be found on damp ground, such as marshes, fens, riverbanks, pond margins and canal sides.

**Herbal actions:** Antispasmodic, alterative, anti-depressant, anticonvulsant, anodyne, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, astringent, cardiotonic, digestive, diuretic, emmenagogue, febrifuge, nervine, sedative, vasodilator.

### Chemistry

- Flavonoid glycosides (including wogonin, baicalin)
- Scutellarin
- Volatile oils
- Lignans

- Resins
- Diterpenoids
- Bitters
- Tannins
- Iridoids
- Phenols
- B vitamins
- Minerals, Iron, Silica, Calcium, potassium and magnesium

### **Energetics**

- **Temperature:** Cooling
- **Moisture:** Drying
- **Tissue State:** Wind/Tension, Heat/Excitation
- **Taste:** Bitter

### **Nervine Actions**

- Skullcap is a wonderful sedative reducing activation in the sympathetic nervous system and supporting us to move into a parasympathetic state.
- It comes into its own as a nervine trophorestorative, aiding long term recovery from chronic and/or traumatic stress.
- It can really help with insomnia and sleep disturbances - the cold-infusion is strongly sedating and can help the nervous system prepare for sleep, resettling sleeping patterns over time.
- It can support with shifting nightmares.
- It can support with general nervousness, anxiety, restlessness, convulsions and muscular pain and tension through its nervine and antispasmodic actions.
- Skullcap offers support during withdrawal from orthodox tranquillisers and antidepressants.

*“Is very effective for nervousness or spasms due to mental overwork or physical exertion. The person gets angry, “flies off the handle” easily, has nervous tics or OCD symptoms.”*

- David Winston

*“Skullcap restores strength to an overwhelmed nervous system, relieving spasms, nerve pain, and*

*cultivating calm. For nervousness, fear, and a sense of being overwhelmed, Skullcap stimulates the brain to produce more endorphins in the system due to the presence of scutellarin in the plant which becomes scutellarin in the body.”*

- Alexis. J Cunningsfolk

*“Skullcap is indicated in irritation of the cerebrospinal nervous system....functional nervous exhaustion, post febrile nervous weakness, chorea, hysteria, agitation and epileptiform convulsions, insomnia, nightmares, restless sleep.”*

- Priest & Priest, 1982

### **Nervous system affinities**

- Research has demonstrated the capacity of *Scutellaria lateriflora*'s flavonoids to bind to brain receptors implicated in modulation of anxiety.
- Skullcap also contains gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), an inhibitory neurotransmitter that modulates anxiety, sleep, convulsions and mood.
- Skullcap contains markedly high levels of glutamine, a non-essential amino acid that plays an important role in immune function – particularly in response to stress.
- Recent studies indicate a presence of melatonin (phytomelatonin).
- Antioxidant properties.

### **Musculoskeletal affinities**

- Pain relief e.g. tension headaches, muscle pain, neuralgia, period pain and arthritis.
- Antispasmodic e.g. twitching muscles, facial tics, tremors, Parkinson's, restless leg syndrome, epilepsy (petit and grand Mal), cramps and palpitations.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Part of integrative shingles treatment.
- Supporting the digestive system: Skullcap's bitter flavour stimulates the liver and can enhance appetite and digestion. As an antispasmodic, it can help reduce spasm and colic, relieve wind and bloating and settle nervous stomach aches.
- Cystitis and irritable bladder: Skullcap's diuretic action makes it useful for treating cystitis and irritable bladder, particularly where there is a nervous

component.

- Supportive with premenstrual tension.

### **Practically working with Skullcap**

- Infusion before bed
- Skullcap Tincture (fresh or dried)

### **Safety considerations**

- Skullcap can sometimes be adulterated or mistakenly mixed with the germander species, *Teucrium chamaedrys* and *Teucrium canadense*. This has resulted in hepatotoxicity.
- Be aware of its hypnotic and anxiolytic drug enhancement properties and potential interactions with other sedative or tranquillising medicines.
- Avoid if pregnant (or only take in a low dose form infrequently).
- Caution in nursing.
- May cause drowsiness - avoid if driving.
- Caution with antidepressant medications.



## ST. JOHN'S WORT

**Latin name:** *Hypericum perforatum*

**Plant family:** Hypericaceae

**Folk names in English:** St John's Wort, Saint John's Wort, St. Joans Wort, Sunshine herb, Solstice wort, Faerie Herb, Fuga Daemonum, Goat Weed, Amber.

**Identification:** Short to medium height plants with upright, branched stems, unstitled oval or oblong blunt-tipped leaves and yellow five-petalled flowers 1-2 cm across. *Hypericum perforatum* has two raised lines down opposite sides of the stem and are not hairy.

**Other species:** There are many species of *Hypericum* including Slender St John's Wort (SJW) (*H. pulchrum*), Hairy SJW (*H. hirsutum*), Trailing SJW (*H. humifusum*), Imperforate SJW (*H. maculatum*), Square-stalked SJW (*H. Tetrapterum*) and Tutsan (*J. Androsaemum*).

**Ecological role:** St John's Wort growing wild, can be found on dry, neutral and basic soils in grasslands, hedgerows, wood edges and on disturbed ground.

**Herbal actions:** Astringent, anodyne, antiviral, antimicrobial, bitter tonic, hepatoprotective, mild nervine sedative, nervous system trophorestorative, vulnerary.

### Chemistry

- Flavonoid derivatives - hyperoside, rutin
- Volatile oils -caryophyllene, methyl-2- octane, n-nonane, n- octanal, n-decanal, alpha and beta pinene
- Naphthodianthones - hypericin, pseudohypericin
- Anthracenes
- Xanthones
- Proanthocyanidins
- Tannins
- Caffeine acid derivatives

## Energetics

- **Temperature:** Warming (gentle)
- **Moisture:** Drying
- **Tissue State:** Wind/Tension, Dry/Atrophy, Cold/Depression, Damp/Stagnation
- **Taste:** Astringent, mild sweetness, oiliness, slight pungency, bitter

## Nervine actions

- Support for depression, shutdown and freeze nervous system states.
- SJW is commonly commodified and sold internationally as a herbal ‘antidepressant’, however, the specific actions are not often explored nor the holistic nature of depression and how it takes a broad range of interventions to support someone experiencing depression. Taking a bottle of SJW is not going to solve someone’s grief or counter the complex psycho-emotional consequences of living in a capitalist, racist and oppressive society. Likewise, there are many intersecting drivers of depression, from poverty to vitamin D deficiency and food allergies. There are different kinds of depression. One type is stagnant depression, which Herbalist David Winston believes SJW is very effective for. Stagnant depression is delineated by the presence of irritability, frustration, and aggravation – it is a higher energy state associated with a degree of liver stagnation. It is more commonly experienced by ‘type A’ type constitutions or people with high levels of stress, adrenal excess, and nerve burnout. It is generally suggested that it can take 2-3 months for St John’s Wort to produce a long lasting effect. I have personally used SJW on a shorter term basis to support with premenstrual tension and found it very effective at lifting my mood and reducing irritability.
- SJW can be useful for insomnia and nightmares.
- It has a gentle relaxant action aiding background anxiety and uplifting mood.
- It’s very useful as a nervine tonic to aid in recovery from chronic stress and trauma.

*“While it can have modest benefits for any type of depressive disorder, it is much more effective for GI-based or hepatic depression. The person has a dyspeptic outlook, a sour stomach and a sour attitude.”*

- David Winston

## **Nervous system affinities**

- SJW also supports with nerve pain - and is used in the treatment of shooting nerve pains, shingles, neuralgia, sciatica etc.
- It can also offer pain relief via nerve affinity but also through modulating inflammation eg. spinal cord injuries, tooth pain, rheumatic pains, arthritis, gout, muscular spasm, cramping and stiffness, sprains, strains and bruising.

## **Digestive system affinities**

- SJW has a strong affinity with the liver.
- Its wound healing properties make it useful for leaky gut/intestinal permeability (in combination with other plants).
- Herbalist Sajah Popham writes that SJW *“effectively helps to reset the digestive system, astringe any “perforations” or leakiness in the gut, re-engage the neural component of digestion, and overall strengthen the solar plexus as a whole. It enhances the absorption of food from the small intestine and removes canker, or ama (stagnancy) from the stomach and small intestine. This makes it an ideal remedy for people with malabsorption type issues.”*
- SJW can be useful for people with heightened bladder sensitivity (who feel the need to urinate frequently). SJW has also been used for bedwetting and urinary tract infections.

## **Other medicinal actions**

- Wound care - St. John's Wort is a fantastic first aid herb. It is used in the treatment of wounds, specifically puncture wounds. Its antimicrobial properties help to disinfect wounds, reduce inflammation and aid in healing. It can also be used for sunburn.
- Expectorant and antimicrobial action of SJW helps to clear phlegm from the chest and relieves coughs, colds and chest infections.

## **Practically working with St John's Wort**

- Fresh herb tincture
- Fresh herb glycerite
- Infused oil (fresh or dried, if good quality)



## Safety considerations

- It is strongly recommended to avoid using SJW when taking other selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's) and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOI's) for depression.
- SJW has been shown to interact and cause changes to the pharmacokinetics of some drugs such as digoxin, tacrolimus, warfarin, and alprazolam.
- Can cause side effects in some people. The most common side-effects are dry mouth, dizziness, increased sensitivity to sunlight (photosensitivity), gastrointestinal symptoms and fatigue.

Also contraindicated for use with:

- Sedative or hypnotic drugs
- Immunosuppressants
- Non-sedating antihistamines
- Contraceptives
- Antiretrovirals
- Anti-epileptic drugs
- Calcium channel blockers used

for high blood pressure

- Cyclosporine
- Chemotherapy
- Macrolide antibiotics
- Certain anti-fungals



*St John's Wort*

# VERVAIN

**Latin name:** *Verbena officinalis*

**Plant family:** Verbenaceae

**Folk names in English:** Enchanter's plant, Herb of Enchantment, Ironherb, Herb of Grace, Herb of the Cross, Holy herb, Holy wort, Indian hyssop, Juno's tears, Pigeon grass, Simpler's joy, Verbena, Herb of Venus, Ferfain, Herba veneris, Van van, Tears of Isis, Devil's hate. Verbena in Latin has been said to mean 'altar plant', referring to its sacred properties. Officinalis means used in medicine.

**Identification:** Vervain's leaves are elongated and deeply cut at the top with round, toothed edges. The numerous long stems that grow out of the clump are rectangular and branching at the top. Some stalkless leaves grow at the base of the stem. Tiny lilac or pinky-white flowers grow directly from the stem, opening gradually up the stem as it grows.

**Other species:** Vervain can sometimes be mistaken for some mints but are unscented.

**Ecological role:** Vervain grows on rough and waste ground. It is generally found on freely-draining, often calcareous soils. It is most frequent in rough grassland, roadsides and scrub but can also be found on coastal cliffs, rocky outcrops and woodland borders.

**Herbal actions:** Alterative, anticoagulant, antioxidant, antimicrobial, anxiolytic, analgesic, antispasmodic, bitter, choleric, cholagogue, emmenagogue, galactagogue, hepatic, mild diaphoretic, nervine.

## Chemistry

- Bitter iridoids
- Volatile oil containing citral, terpenes and alcohols
- Alkaloids
- Mucilage
- Tannins

- Verbenalol (a bitter compound)

### **Energetics**

- **Temperature:** Cooling
- **Moisture:** Drying
- **Tissue State:** Wind/Tension, Heat/Excitation
- **Taste:** Bitter

### **Nervine actions**

- Vervain is a beautiful and powerful tonic for the nervous system that has been used for thousands of years and was one of the nine sacred herbs for the Druids.
- It has a gentle sedative action in reducing sympathetic activation e.g. irritability, hyperarousal, hypersensitivity, excess tension and stress.
- It is especially supportive for people trying to recover from nervous exhaustion, as well as chronic illness and fatigue (which are exhausting in and of themselves).
- I always call it my 'breakdown herb' for people who are recovering from breakdowns of different varieties in their lives.
- Vervain can offer support during withdrawals of different kinds.
- It is indicated for depression coming from exhaustion and over activation in the nervous system long term. It's also helpful in post natal or post operative depression.
- Vervain can support many of the symptoms we develop when enduring stress such as headaches, migraines, insomnia, high blood pressure and general aches and pains.
- Vervain can aid sleep issues such as nightmares.
- It's affinity for the nervous system make it helpful in treating shingles due to its antimicrobial, immune-enhancing and nervine properties.
- It can be supportive in cases of premenstrual tension where there is anger and irritability, as well as for people who are menopausal experiencing 'heat' symptoms such as hot flashes or outbursts of anger.

### **Digestive affinities**

- Vervain's bitter action stimulates the liver which can help relieve headaches,

lethargy, irritability and constipation.

- Vervain root is also astringent and can be used in cases of diarrhea and dysentery.

### **Other medicinal actions**

- Headaches and migraines (bitter action on liver).
- High blood pressure.
- Said to enhance contractions during childbirth and enhance milk supply for people who are nursing. Vervain is also helpful for insufficient lactation especially associated with stress.
- Its diaphoretic action makes it useful in reducing fevers.
- Vervain is useful in the treatment of UTIs because of its cooling, diuretic and antimicrobial actions.
- Vervain can be added to lotions for eczema, sores and neuralgia.
- Vervain's astringent action makes it a useful ingredient in herbal mouthwashes for bleeding gums and mouth ulcers.
- Immune support - The Welsh Myddfai physicians recommended vervain for the treatment of swollen glands.

### **Practically working with Vervain**

- Fresh herb tincture
- Dried herb tincture
- Fresh or dried herb tea/infusion

### **Safety Considerations**

- Avoid in pregnancy.
- Caution with nursing.
- Caution with iron deficiency.
- Caution with blood thinning medication.



*Vervain*

## CONCLUSION: PLANTS AS COMRADES AGAINST AND BEYOND THE STATE

Thank you so much for your time and energy in reading this book. This book is really only the start and contains more questions than answers. I hope it can inspire herbalists and herbal projects around the world, as well as people organising for liberation in different ways to integrate plant medicines into their life. If it can support even just one ex-prisoner and help them heal from their experience of incarceration, then that's enough for me. It's done its job.

I want to end with a love note, I guess, to the plants, and an acknowledgement of plants as comrades. I know not everyone likes the word comrade, it can feel alienating, a bit 'bro-socialist' or Soviet. I know in Spanish, they have really beautiful words like *compañera/o/x*, which are much more tender and loving. For me, comradeship is about friendship and dedication to each other. It's about mutual responsibility and mutual support. It's about showing up for someone when they're experiencing oppression and also having them show up for you and trying to be consistent in each other's lives. Some of the biggest comrades in my life have been plants.

They have been the beings that have given me strength and support and energy and inspiration. Their medicine has literally helped to repair the cells in my body, to repair inflammation, to help address trauma, to shift nightmares, to sleep regularly. They've given me so many gifts and given their medicine so generously. In the medicine making section I talk about how I define medicine making as sacred. I know that's not everyone's worldview, but it is mine. I hope that people have felt inspired to try and build relationships with plants. For me they've given me not only physical and biochemical support, but they've also given me friendship and community and just consistent strength and encouragement. To some people that might sound really bizarre, but to the plant lovers reading this book, I think you'll know exactly what I mean.

People who have organised in different movements for liberation - especially Indigenous peoples resisting colonialism - have drawn on their relationships with non-humans. There are powerful ways for non-humans or other-than-humans can support us in these struggles for freedom. When I was about to

go into prison, I got my first half sleeve tattoo done on my arms. It has text that says, “never alone”, and images of an owl, a fox, and a bunch of roses. In the face of all this repression, the house raids and arrests and being separated from my friends and the police destroying this campaign, I ultimately knew that we weren’t alone. The animals were on our side. The plants were on our side. They’re not on the side of the state. Why on earth would they be on the side of an oppressor who destroys their habitats and destroys their communities and pollutes their land and their water? If we tap into that strength, then we really are never alone.

I wouldn’t have been able to stay involved in sometimes gruelling and difficult projects or movements without tapping on some external strength. For some people, that strength comes from God, or Allah, or from magical practices and so on. For me, I really get that strength from the land. And I need it. It’s heavy stuff. One day I’m visiting a prison, the next day I have a call with a prisoner family member, and the next week I’m in France doing first aid for six days straight for people beaten by the police.

I remember being interviewed on a podcast a couple of years ago and I was asked “How do you cope with all this? All your work is about state violence.” I just laughed, and replied that the answer is always plants. Plants are always keeping me going. I can sustain that energy in Calais because I have herbs to support my immune system. I can handle that horrific prison visit trying to support my friend to not kill themselves because after the visit I can have a sip of tincture or glycerite and it makes me feel whole again and supported.

In this book, alongside introducing state violence, I’ve also talked about movements that are working towards eradicating it or at least challenging it somehow. These are really big, abolitionist visions and it can be hard sometimes to imagine a world without the state, or even without one iteration of state violence, let alone the whole lot. But I think plants can give us that. Plants provide us with inspiration and strength of a world without these systems of oppression.

Human societies have existed forever without states by having relationships with the land, tending the wild, cultivating forest gardens, growing food, making medicine from plants.

There are so many examples of people living an ecological relationship with the land and it is possible to sustain our human communities through those relationships. I think a big part of herbalism is embracing that bigger picture of what a world embedded with reciprocity with plants looks like.

It doesn't look like industrial agriculture where we're chemically obliterating the soil food web, or where we're poisoning the land with herbicides and pesticides. It might look like agroecology, forest gardens, market gardens and composting. As herbalists there are so many ways open to us to sustain ourselves and I think herbalism is just one niche in that whole ecosystem of a completely different way of life.

Plants can support us to be resilient to climate change and challenge state violence and have an anti-capitalist lifeway. Plants to me are the original anti-capitalists. They give generously and abundantly, and they don't charge you for their services.

Pharmaceutical companies all over the world have tried through biopiracy to trademark plant medicines and steal their compounds and make them into commodities. In many ways they've been successful and in others they've failed because plants don't work like that.

Plant medicines work in complexity, they're completely unique from person to person depending how that person is working with that plant. And that is just not great for capitalism which thrives on commodification of life and exploitation of life and being able to mass-market products.

Plant medicines can offer us anti-capitalist inspiration by showing us what real abundance and generosity look like - not in a privileged or hippie, manifestation "oh, everything is abundant" way, but in the really legit way that plants are abundant and they sustain life.

And also, plants are queer! They can also help challenge our cis-heteronormative world views. The biology that we're taught in school, that gender and sex is everything under the sun, doesn't recognise the beautiful complexity of nature. Plants are a guiding light for queer and trans communities and for anyone trying to challenge oppressive forms of gender or sexuality.

I really hope that this book can be a seed for many different projects around the world. Please contact me for support and advice and let me know what you're doing. I'd love to interview you on the podcast and amplify things that you're working on. This book is just the tip of the iceberg of a major field of work, and I would love to look back in the future and see how many people started working with plant medicines to support people experiencing state violence and ultimately challenging the state, capitalism and all forms of domination.

Please don't let this book remain just words on a page. Please take it as a stepping stone and put this book into practice. Get your hands in the soil, try

plant teas. Please build your little medicine cabinet of plant allies that can support you, whether you're organising for liberation or whether you're a herbalist who wants to start experimenting with starting a local project. I love supporting people to move in the direction of making their own medicines because it's so liberating and empowering, but if that's not where you are, then that's also fine.

I started in a prison courtyard just sleeping with a dandelion root under my pillow, you know? If all the spoons you've got is to just have one leaf of one plant under your pillow at night, then do that, and see how life changing their support can be.

Until all are free!

### **Free Them All**

Free Them All as in no more humans in cages

Free Them All as in imprisonment will never solve complex social problems that create harm

Free Them All as in ending patriarchy that enables abuse and violence

Free Them All as in no more rape culture

Free Them All as in end white supremacy

Free Them All as in no more poverty

Free Them All as in empty the detention centres

Free Them All as in open the borders, migration is life

Free Them All as in **LAND BACK**

Free Them All as in freedom from occupying forces and colonial violence

Free Them All as in no more animals in cages

Free Them All as in whales and sea life return to the oceans

Free Them All as in no more waged labour, servitude or slavery

Free Them All as in liberate learning, no more exclusions

Free Them All as in plants and ecosystems are able to thrive

Free Them All as in the soil food web is free from capitalist agriculture

Free Them All as in queer bodies live free from violence

Free Them All as in rivers run free to the sea

Free Them All as in building collective life

Free Them All as in free our bodies from the traumatic stress of living in this world



# PART 8: RESOURCES

## RESOURCES

You can find all the resources mentioned in the book at:

<https://solidarityapothecary.org/herbalism-and-state-violence-resources/>

## MEDICINE MAKING BASICS

There are a huge number of factors contributing to what makes medicine potent. Soil biology, ecological conditions, seasonal cycles, variability by plant, growth stages, cultivation practices, harvesting and storage practices all influence the quality of a medicine produced. For many, relationship, spirit and ceremony are also important.

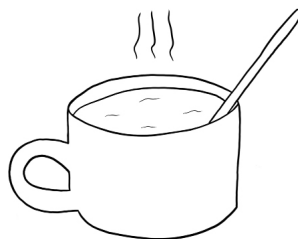
Medicine making is something I go into more depth with in the *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course. I also teach an in-person three-day Practical Medicine Making Intensive course that gives people the practical skills to feel confident in medicine making.

This section just runs through the absolute basics. I encourage you to keep learning about medicine making, ideally from local herbalists that make their own medicine so you can learn more of the nuanced tricks of the trade. The best way to make high quality medicine is devoted practice.

One way to think about medicine making is to think about solvency. Herbal constituents are the chemicals that have a medicinal effect on the body. As we choose which medicines to prepare, we are always thinking about which formats will best extract these constituents. Herbalists call these solvents, menstrums and they include alcohol/ethanol, glycerine, water, vinegar, oil and so on. We are thinking about the ability of the constituents in the herbs to be dissolved in these menstrums. There are strengths and weaknesses to all of them for all different plants. Herbalism is a never ending journey of learning.

### **Water medicines: teas, infusions, decoctions**

Never underestimate the incredible power of herbal tea. We already consume billions of gallons of tea worldwide every day. If I'm ever speaking to someone who is sceptical about herbal medicine, I always say to them, wow so you don't drink tea or coffee? And they look confused then the 'penny drops'. They are already consuming cup after cup of plant



medicine for their desired effects without even realising it.

### **Herbal tea**

Herbal tea at its most simple is adding hot water to a herb and drinking it. Believe it or not there are actually a ton of different ways to make tea. Sometimes the easiest is to just drink herbal tea with a tea bag. It's simple and efficient and generally the most accessible way.

If we have access to fresh or dried herbs, we may just add a teaspoon or so to a mug and cover with hot water and leave for 5-10 minutes before drinking to make sure it is really brewing up in strength. I'd also just really encourage you to experiment if you prefer tea to be stronger or weaker in flavour. You could also use small coffee percolators, cafetieres or teapots.

Each plant will generally be different and how much fresh or dried herb you are using can be totally different depending on the medicinal needs you have. Picking a little sprig of fresh Lemon Balm as a nice refreshing tea on a summer afternoon when I'm in a good mood, might be enough. When I've had a really awful prison visit and I need something to seriously help me move into parasympathetic, I might then have several leaves or even several teaspoons of dried herb in a cafetiere to get the medicinal strength I'm desiring. Again, my advice is to just experiment.

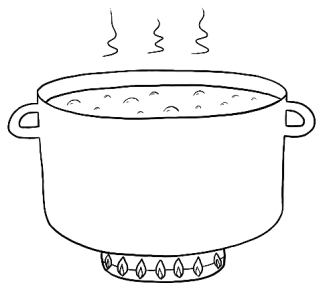
### **Hot infusions**

A hot infusion is basically the same as a tea but brewed for longer. For some plants, you might want to leave them brewing overnight to get maximum strength. If you do leave them overnight, then make sure you take out all the plant material the next morning.

If you are making a tea or an infusion with an aromatic plant (such as chamomile) then it is best to cover the container with some kind of lid so that the aromatic oils don't escape as much.

### **Cold infusions**

Some plants make more powerful medicine when covered with cold (or cooler water rather than boiling hot). This is mainly plants with large amounts of mucilage (aka healing slime!), such as Marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*). It's generally best to let these cold infusions brew for as long as possible - ideally 12 hours if possible.



## Decoctions

A decoction is basically where you add plant material to a pan with water and then simmer gently. This is good for at least 20-30 minutes but, ideally, keep it going until the water has reduced to half. Once it is boiled you can strain and drink. It will store for 24 hours or longer in a fridge ideally, and then you can drink a cup or two through the course of a day.

Decoctions are fantastic for roots that are a bit more stubborn in terms of extracting constituents. Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) for example makes an absolutely delicious sweet and ‘oily’ decoction. Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) is also a familiar favourite. Again, experiment yourself and do your best to taste test the differences between a herbal tea, longer infusion and decoction.

## Tinctures

Tinctures are a form of herbal medicine where plants have been extracted in alcohol (ethanol). They date back thousands of years - as far as distilled alcohol.

There are several methods for making tinctures depending on your needs, the plant, the medicinal strength or standardisation you are seeking. I will cover tincture making with folk methods and weight to volume methods, however, there are more complicated options such as percolation and multi-fractional extracts that are beyond the scope of this book.

### Equipment needed

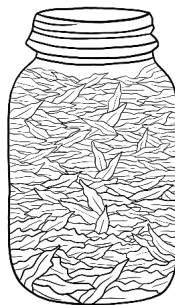
- Bowl or bag for collecting herbs
- Scissors/secateur/tools for harvesting
- Jars (clean/sterile)
- Chopping board
- Knife/blender
- Labels & pen
- Vodka

### Tinctures - folk method

1. Harvest your herb (see the section on harvesting)

2. Stuff a jar full of chopped herb material
  3. Cover with vodka (37.5% alcohol).
- Brandy is also a good option.

4. Label
5. Leave to infuse over several weeks
6. Shake/stir occasionally
7. Strain and decant (see section on straining options)
8. Label



It really is that simple for home-made folk tinctures! They will last for several years (if stored correctly) and are a fantastic way of preserving the incredible qualities of different plant medicines.

### **Tinctures - weight to volume method (with vodka)**

1. Harvest your herb (see the section on harvesting)
2. Process the herb with a blender or knife, chopping as finely as possible
3. Weigh the herb
4. Choose your ratio e.g. 1:2 (one part herb to two parts menstrum). For example:
  - a. 50 grams of herb
  - b. 100ml vodka (the menstrum)
5. Combine in jar, stir/blend
6. Leave to infuse over several weeks
7. Shake/stir occasionally
8. Strain and decant (see section on straining options)
9. Label

### **Tinctures - weight to volume method (with pure ethanol)**

If you have access to pure ethanol, you will need to calculate the water content you will add to determine your menstrum strength. A good herbal textbook will have recommended strengths of ethanol to water for different herbs. Some plants extract better in a higher % of alcohol.

For example: *Calendula officinalis*.

In the UK, we commonly make calendula tincture either at 90% or 25%.

The 90% blend has a much stronger content of resins. It is generally used topically, for example, for our wound spray that we use in our clinic in Calais.

If we were making a 1:2 mix at 90% using the fresh flowers we would use:

- 100% alcohol (no water, because fresh plants have a high water content).
- 1:2 – 50g flowers, 100ml ethanol

For dried herbs, we would use a higher water content. For example, it could be 60% ethanol and 40% water. Each herb is different!

For beginners, I always recommend starting to make tinctures with vodka for simplicity purposes. Personally, I find tinctures with higher ratios of ethanol to taste pretty vile and much prefer the neutral taste of vodka. We may pass off the importance of things like taste sometimes but I actually find that it makes a big difference as to whether someone continues taking medicine. It is okay for medicines to taste delicious or at least stomachable!

## **Glycerites**

Glycerites are defined as mixtures of medicinal substances with glycerine. This generally means a liquid medicine but glycerine can also be used to make lozenges, creams and lotions and other medicinal products.

What is glycerine? Glycerine is the commercial name for products whose main component is at least 95% or more glycerol. Glycerol is naturally occurring in all animals and plant matter in a combined form as glycerides in fats and oils, or in intracellular spaces as lipids. I teach a whole online course about making herbal medicine with glycerine, please check it out (and no one is turned away for lack of funds).

Glycerine's solvency lies between water and alcohol. That means it's particularly useful where neither water or alcohol alone are appropriate. We generally always combine glycerine with a bit of water. Combining glycerine with water gives you the best of both worlds and allows you to preserve herbs that extract well in water. You can also combine glycerine with other menstrums such as alcohol tinctures, vinegars etc.

I promote two methods of making glycerites, cold and warm. A cold glycerite means not using heat (such as a slow cooker) but leaving it to infuse similarly to how you would in tincture making.

Cold glycerites involve infusing herbs in glycerine and water over a period of time. They are best with fresh herbs. In my experience, not every herb gives 'generously' to glycerine meaning that many don't extract well. In my glycerine

workshop, I go into detail about herbal constituents and which work well with glycerine and which don't (or work less well).

For herbs detailed in this book, the ones which make fantastic fresh cold glycerites include rose petals, lemon balm, hawthorn flowers and berries and St John's wort. The benefits of glycerites are that they are alcohol-free medicines which means they are accessible for multiple community members where tinctures aren't, for example, people who avoid alcohol for religious or health reasons, people in recovery, pregnant people, children and the elderly etc.

### **Cold glycerites – DIY folk method**

1. Harvest your herb
2. Process the herb with a blender or knife, chopping as finely as possible
3. Stuff a jar full of herb material
4. Cover with 75% glycerine
5. Cover with 25% water
6. Label
7. Shake/stir occasionally
8. Leave to infuse over several weeks (in my experience, they need longer than tinctures - at least 8 weeks is ideal)
9. Strain and decant
10. Bottle and label

### **Cold glycerites – weight to volume method**

1. Harvest your herb
2. Process the herb with a blender or knife, chopping as finely as possible
3. Weigh the herb
4. Choose your ratio e.g. 1:2 (one part herb to two parts menstrum). For example:
  - a. 50 grams of herb, 100ml of menstrum
  - b. 75% glycerin = 75ml
  - c. 25% water = 25ml
5. Combine in jar
6. Shake/stir occasionally
7. Leave for four weeks minimum
8. Strain and decant



## 9. Bottle and label

### Warm glycerites

Warm glycerites are when we are using heat to make a glycerite. A warm method brings a lot of kinetic energy. Imagine drinking a cup of herbal tea with cold water - pretty rubbish and not strong enough right? Rehydrating dried plant material with hot water helps to burst open the cell walls and release their contents.

Slow cookers are the most effective in my experience. It means that I can make a potent medicine within 48 hours, rather than waiting for things to infuse for weeks on end. This is what makes various medicine making projects feasible - because we can continuously make medicines en masse quickly and easily.

### Warm glycerite – dried herb

1. Fill a slow cooker 60% full with dried herb (you can change this ratio based on the herb you are infusing, how strong it needs to be etc.)
2. Cover with 75% glycerine
3. Cover with 25% water
4. Stir really well
5. Put on the slow cooker in intervals – heat up for an hour or so and then turn off to cool, repeat
6. Leave off overnight and then continue the next day
7. In my experience 48 hours of this process is ideal

Every slow cooker is different in terms of heat settings and temperature



*Ginger glycerite in the slow cooker*



*Elderberries, fennel and cinnamon glycerite as the basis of cough syrup*

which is why it's difficult to be specific. Likewise some herbs are more 'stubborn' and take longer to infuse even with heat and need a higher heat setting. Some herbs, like elderberries, are extremely generous and can actually burn. Everyone wants exact answers but honestly, the best way is to experiment yourself with different herbs and settings.

### **Warm glycerite – fresh herb**

While the warm glycerite method is a wonderful method with dried herbs, you can also use it with fresh herbs too. In this case you need to account for their water content and have a slightly higher ratio of herb and glycerine.

1. Fill a slow cooker 70% full with fresh herb
2. Cover with 85% glycerine
3. Cover with 15% water
4. More glycerine is used because of the water content of the fresh herb
5. Stir really well, put the lid on
6. Put on slow cooker in intervals – heat up for an hour or so and then turn off to cool. Repeat. Leave overnight and continue. In my experience 48 hours of this process is ideal.

### **Warm glycerite - multiple herbs**

You can add several herbs in the slow cooker at once. This could be for a particular medicine such as. cough syrup or to make a unique blend for an individual. In my experience, this works better with dried herbs. An example of this is our 'Calais cough syrup' recipe that you can find in the border violence section. As with all glycerite making, keep tasting them for strength and quality.

### **Adding a strong decoction**

To make an even stronger glycerite blend, the water content that you add can be a strong herbal infusion that you've already decocted. For example: you could make a strong chamomile tea and then add this in when making chamomile glycerite - something like 75% glycerine, 25% chamomile tea. You can also add alcohol tincture if not making it for people avoiding alcohol, about 5-10% is enough. Wait until the mix has cooled before adding the alcohol.

## **Lozenges**

Lozenges are a fantastic way of utilising glycerine and powders to make edible medicines. They are an efficient way of consuming herbal powders with the advantage of directly lining tissues which can be great for people experiencing acid reflux. Unfortunately the shelf life is quite short (maximum 8 weeks in my experience depending on storage conditions). You can experiment!

Please see the '*Calais Indigestion Lozenges*' recipe in the border violence section for instructions.

## **Vinegars**

A herbal vinegar is a form of herbal medicine where plants have been extracted in vinegar – usually apple cider vinegar. They are a great alternative to alcohol tinctures. Vinegar is superb for extracting minerals from mineral-rich herbs such as horsetail, oat straw, alfalfa, nettles etc. You can make herbal vinegars using a similar DIY folk method, as well as a slow cooker method.

Please make sure you check out the fire cider vinegar recipe in the police violence section to learn about one of my favourite folk vinegars commonly made to support people through the winter.

### **Herbal vinegars – DIY folk method**

1. Stuff a jar full of herb material
2. Cover with apple cider vinegar (local and organic preferable)
3. Pop any air bubbles
4. Label
5. Leave to infuse over several weeks
6. Monitor, shake/stir occasionally
7. Strain and decant

### **Herbal vinegar – slow cooker method**

1. Fill a slow cooker 60% full with herb material
2. Cover with apple cider vinegar
3. Stir really well
4. Put on slow cooker in intervals – heat up for an hour or so and then turn off to cool. Repeat. Leave overnight and continue. In my experience 48 hours of this process is ideal.

5. Allow to cool and decant.
6. Combine with a cold-infused vinegar if possible for full vinegar benefits.

### **Infused oils**

An infused oil is a form of herbal medicine where plants have been extracted in oil. Infused oils can be used alone or can be used in ointment and lotion making. They are a fantastic way of applying herbal medicine topically (via the skin).

As with all herbal medicine making, there are lots of different methods to making infused oils such as the cold method (sun infused), warm infused method and so on. Oil and water is not a good mix so before you start, it's important to ensure everything is sterile and completely dry.

#### **Infused oils - cold method**

1. Make sure plant material is dry
2. Coarsely chop up the plant
3. Pack into a clean, dry jar
4. Cover with oil - make sure it's all completely covered & pop out any air bubbles
5. Screw tight & label
6. Check over the next few days to ensure no 'bits' of plant matter are sticking out
7. Leave to macerate
8. When ready, strain out the plant matter through a muslin cloth
9. Store in a clean, dry, glass bottle/jar
10. You can add a couple of drops of essential oil as a preservative

Fresh herbs that do well with this method include St John's Wort, mullein Flowers and garlic especially.

#### **Warm method: bain-marie/double boiler method**

1. You can use a bain-marie with the herb material and oil.
2. It depends on the herb but an example ratio is 25-40g of dried herb or 50g fresh herb and 150ml of oil.
3. Simmer slowly over another pan with water in for at least four hours

4. Allow to cool then strain through muslin
5. For extra potency you can 'double infuse' - add the strained oil with new herbs and repeat the process

### **Warm method: Slow cooker method**

1. Place herbs in a jar and cover with oil
2. Place jars in slow cooker, add water to the slow cooker so that the jars are 3/4 covered
3. Put on a low heat
4. Allow to cool

Don't forget to check out how to make infused lavender oil in the recipes and remedies section of the genocide, occupation and war section.

### **Straining strategies**

There are different options for straining depending on your budget, the quantities of medicine you're making and the strength of your wrists/capacity for physical squeezing!

One of my favourites is a jam making tripod that has a muslin bag attached to it. I can hang it over a jug and simply tip my jar and empty the contents letting gravity do the work. I'll then give it a little squeeze at the end to get the most out of the marc (marc is the name for what's left over after maceration and extraction into a menstrum). Another option is a wine press. There are even mechanical wine presses for those with the resources to purchase one!

A very simple method is simply a colander over a bowl and some muslin fabric. I like to order muslin in bulk and wash it after use to keep using it. For more mass or community scale medicine making, my absolute favourite are food-grade buckets! I use a giant colander over a bucket with a piece of muslin and again, I let gravity do the work before squeezing things out by hand.

### **Other medicine making methods and ways to use herbs**

#### **Eye baths**

Be very careful with anything to do with your eyes. You need to be super hygienic and careful that you don't introduce any unwanted material! Some of

the herbs listed in this book will have a great effect on the eyes in terms of reducing inflammation and irritation. You can brew these up as a tea (see above) and then make sure you leave it to cool.

The best thing I found to use is one of those tiny plastic measuring cups. It almost perfectly fits the eye! You can fill one of these with some cold tea and then basically put your eye over it and rapidly flutter your eyelids to effectively wash them out. Some people might tip it up with their eye inside but I don't enjoy this at all as you can then get tea all over yourself and I find the eye has a natural reaction to close to protect itself.



### **Adding herbs to baths**

To add herbs to your bath, it's best to brew them up in a tea or infusion as described above and then simply tip it in the bath. This is easier after you have strained the herbs out, so you have less cleaning up to do. However, some people might like having herbs floating around in there, you'll just need to wipe them all out afterwards. I always chuckle when I see these beautiful curated photos of rose petals in baths on Instagram because I think of how much faff it will be getting them all out the bathtub afterwards! But they are beautiful for sure and maybe it is worth it.

### **Foot baths**

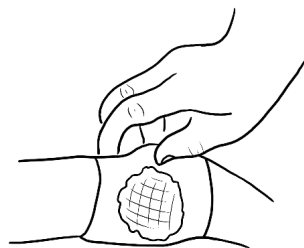
So often the challenge here is finding a container big enough for your feet. Ideally, you'd want something the size of a washing up bowl. If you can't find anything that big you might be able to just use a normal bowl and soak parts of your foot that need it, for example an infected toe.

If you can get some kind of plastic container, then fill it with hot water, add in plants, and let it cool enough for your comfort. This is an amazing way to support with skin and other issues on the feet. Even better is to make a strong infusion beforehand and add into the container.

### **Poultices**

At its absolute simplest, a poultice is plant material prepared and applied directly to the skin. There are different ways plants may need to be prepared

depending on what plant is being used and what is being treated. A simple 'spit poultice' is where you chew the plant material (such as a plantain leaf) in your mouth, just biting it and adding some of your saliva in there, and then you place it over the affected area. The spit helps to activate some of the compounds in the plant. There is understanding that chewing up the plant also enables plant medicine to act internally or to trigger certain healing processes in the body.



A more advanced method is to mix the herb with water for two minutes. This could be dried or fresh herb or a herbal powder. If it's possible to 'simmer' the herb that's amazing, but if not, then just brewing for a couple of minutes will work fine too. You can then apply the wet/damp herb to the affected area.

Depending on what you are treating, it can also be nice to mix the herbs with some kind of flour to make it more of a paste. Sometimes you might need to use a gauze in-between the herbs and the direct skin.

## **Compress**

A compress is where you soak some material in a herb tea or infusion and then apply to the skin. This can be hot or cold depending on the condition. Muslin is great, but you can also use what you have available, for example a tea towel or a pillow case.

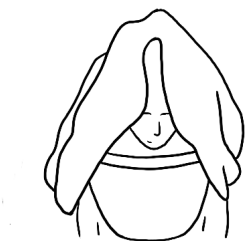
## **Burning herbs**

People have burnt herbs for thousands of years. This is often as part of spiritual rituals and to cleanse spaces, but can also be for practical purposes such as trying to fumigate and prevent infectious diseases spreading within a space. You can tie up small bundles of dried herbs and burn them.

All you need to do is gently light the ends and carry around your space before dibbing it out. Don't go too mad as a lot of the aromatic chemicals are very strong. Burning for a minute or two will be plenty. Please see the section on house raids in the state repression section for more about burning herbs.

## **Steams**

To do a simple herbal steam, simply add the herbs to a bowl with some



hot water. Cover yourself and the bowl with a towel so that the steam warms up your face. You might want to keep adding in hot water to extend the steam. A face steam helps to clear out your sinuses and it's also a good way to make the most of a plant's antimicrobial properties. You can also use essential oils.

Options for making medicine are absolutely endless. Other medicine making methods beyond the scope of this book include:

- Percolation
- Fluid extracts
- Soxhlet extracts
- Hydrosol distillation
- Herbal wines, beers, cordials
- Gargles and mouthwashes
- Flower essences
- Aromatherapy e.g. adding essential oils to carrier oils, diffusion, topical applications
- Sitz baths
- Capsules
- Suppositories and pessaries
- Lotions & cosmetics
- Snuff
- Herbal Pillows
- Herbal salts
- Food! (There are a million and one ways to integrate herbs into food!)

What I love about herbalism is that it enables creativity and experimentation. Most medicine making methods rest on the same principles - high quality plants, playing to the plant's strength in terms of the medicine it offers, and choosing the most appropriate method for you and your community's needs. Do your best and get stuck in.



## HARVESTING, DRYING AND STORAGE

### **Harvesting herbs**

Harvesting plant medicines is a sacred act, one formed by the relationship between humans and plant communities over thousands of years. This section includes some basic tips for safe and ecological foraging or harvesting of wild plants, as well as those that have been cultivated.

I'm aware that people may be reading this book from around the world so I know there will be different contexts. For some people, harvesting will be very familiar and already exist in your traditions. For others who are settlers on stolen land, your relationship might feel much more complicated. For many of us, we have grown up with none of these skills - we can recognise corporate logos but not know the names or distinguishing characteristics of the most common local plants. This was absolutely me before learning herbalism. And so this whole world can feel a bit exhausting - that we will never know 'enough', that we are 'rubbish' at plant identification or that there's so much to learn we don't know where to start.

I've written about this before but I really believe we should begin with one plant. Get confident with identification and medicine making with that one herb and learn everything you can about it. If you are new to things like foraging then learning from people more experienced is absolutely invaluable to helping you identify plants 'in the field' rather than from a book or plant ID guide.

### **Important points when harvesting plant medicines:**

#### **Follow local Indigenous protocols:**

*“Indigenous harvesting protocols were put into place over thousands of years of lived experience with the landscape on which we all reside. These protocols exist for important reasons... whether it is for purposes of sustainability, personal safety, or ceremony, you should follow the protocols of the people who came before you. Follow the protocols of your teachers and advisors. If you are not on the land of your ancestors and you would still like to honor them, it might be advisable to first follow the protocols of the people whose land you are on and ask elders or other knowledge holders if you may then honor your own peoples' protocols without any*

*disrespect to the land, you're on. Remember that protocols exist for a reason and that a plant which is plentiful in some areas may be threatened in others. So, talk to local indigenous peoples to find out what protocols best serve sustainability and overall plant and human health."*

- *Best Practices for Foraging and Harvesting Indigenous and Wild Plants*. Prepared by Linda Black Elk and Lisa Iron Cloud

**Consent:** Always ask a plant if it's okay to harvest them before taking. Cue into subtle feelings and responses. Or not so subtle (like getting cut with a thorn!) In a medicine making course I hosted, we had a great group conversation about this where people shared their examples of feeling like plants had communicated to not harvest them (getting hit in the face with brambles, falling over, getting stung by wasps, etc!)

**Reciprocity:** It is not just about 'taking' - good foraging/harvesting involves tending the land. Over time this can mean developing a relationship with place where you can also support plants through spreading their seeds, replanting roots and other actions of reciprocity. It means resisting developments organising in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, engaging in land defence and other ecological campaigns. It may also mean creating gardens, botanical sanctuaries, establishing projects etc.

**Ecological concerns:** So many beings depend on plant medicines (insects, the soil food web, birds, mammals and on and on). Learn which species are at risk or endangered and prioritise what is abundant! Plants such as nettles and dandelions grow absolutely all over the place where I live, but nettles can be scarce in other places. Finally, don't underestimate the basics - avoid trampling some plants to access others, respect the land, don't leave rubbish etc.

**Safety concerns:** Be vigilant in ensuring you have correctly identified a plant before harvesting. As mentioned above, go out with a more experienced plant person first, if possible. Have a good quality plant identification guide with you that actually works for your learning style. If you love the geekery of following a botanical key in detail, then follow that. If line drawings or abundant photographs suit your brain more, go for that! Learn about poisonous plants in your region and potential 'look alikes'.

**Contamination concerns:** Contamination is inevitable in industrial capitalism. Not everyone has access to beautiful organically managed land. Oftentimes our herbalism comes with polluted environments. My time practising herbalism in prison was a clear example. If we do have some freedom

and choice to avoid certain areas then this is ideal. Particularly if we are making medicine to distribute to others, I feel it is important to do the very best we can. Some places with more chemical contamination can include roadsides, train tracks, powerlines, cultivated fields and agricultural land with heavy herbicide and pesticide use (and nearby streams and waterways may have chemical run off so be cautious when harvesting from waterbanks).

**Overharvesting concerns:** The question of how much to harvest depends on the plant and its contexts. It makes a big difference if a herb is endangered or locally abundant and it's important to never over harvest. One rule of thumb is that the tree, for example, should not look that different from when you started. Another important point is to only harvest what you will realistically use.

### **Harvesting tips**

There are so many different amazing parts of plants that can be harvested and they all have their own intricacies. Below are some general approaches but be aware that many herbs will contradict these guidelines. Generally, we harvest when herbs are ideally dry. Some herbs are best to harvest in full sun (especially aromatic herbs high in essential oils). We are always trying to choose healthy/strong/vital looking plants.

**Flowers:** These are often very delicate! Don't wash them. Shake off any insects (or leave them a while to wander off).

**Leaves:** Harvesting leaves depends on the herb - some are tasty when very young, others you need to wait till they are fully developed. Generally, they are ideal to harvest before flowering. But again, every plant medicine is different!

**Roots:** For some plants, taking their root is sacred because you may be literally taking that being's life. For perennials (plants that live more than two years) - once again, it depends on the plant. Ideally harvest in late autumn or early spring when they are 2+ years old. For biennials (plants which live for two years) - harvest in the autumn or early spring of the first year.

**Barks:** Never ring a tree or harvest too much as it will kill them. Take bark from small branches or pruned branches. Bark harvesting depends on the tree, whether you are harvesting inner or outer bark.

**Fruits:** Are best picked when very nearly ripe or when ripe.

**Seeds:** Harvest when ripe.

## **Drying herbs**

Like most aspects of medicine making, successfully drying herbs is a bit of an experiment! Drying too fast with too much heat can mean a herb may lose potency. Drying too slowly can lead to mould and decomposition.

**Dehydrators:** I'd strongly recommend a dehydrator if you can afford one/ have space for one. I adore mine and it was the best money ever spent. It means that I can dry herbs to their different specifications and they remain vivid in colour and strong in potency. Note that when plants are dry they will be brittle.

**Other options:** If a dehydrator is not possible then the best next thing is drying in a dark, warm place without direct sunlight. You can dry herbs in hanging bundles, or you can lay them on racks with stainless steel wire or muslin cloth (avoid newspaper). Aim for 30-40 degrees.

If you are drying roots I would recommend cutting them up into small thin bits that dry out more easily.

## **Storing herbs**

The main priorities are storing herbs in a cool, dry place. I personally think amber or opaque glass jars or ceramic jars are ideal. Some people store herbs in plastic bags inside plastic boxes. I find there is a bit more risk of 'sweating' but if you are storing them in a very cool place this is lessened, and if you have dried them to perfection the risk is less again.

I recommend re-visiting your stored herbs to check how they are doing. You can use up old herbs by making medicine with them (like tinctures) or you may inevitably have to compost them when needed. Different plants and plant parts store well for different lengths of time depending on storage conditions.

As with all medicine making, you really do learn by practice and experimentation. So I encourage you to harvest different herbs and attempt to dry them well to learn the important nuances and make this skill second nature.

## GLOSSARY

**Active Constituent:** A chemical molecule that can alter biochemical processes in the body. Most plants or herbs contain dozens, sometimes hundreds, of active chemicals that work together to alter functioning processes of the body, usually in subtle ways.

**ADHD:** A neurobiological ‘disorder’ affecting the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which controls ‘executive functions’ and other self-regulatory processes—cognitive abilities that allow people to control and orchestrate thoughts and actions.

**Alterative:** Herbs that feed and nourish the body to promote systemic harmony. They strengthen health by nourishing the body and promoting both assimilation and detoxification by improving metabolism.

**Analgesic:** Relieves pain.

**Anarchism:** A political theory and social movement developed through history that aims to eradicate all forms of domination. There are many definitions of anarchism but they generally share the premise of

being against the state and capitalism and different forms of oppression, with a desire to radically change society towards freedom without hierarchy and exploitation of one group over another.

**Annual:** A plant that goes through a complete life cycle in one year, dying at the end.

**Anodyne:** Lessens or relieves pain.

**Antibiotic:** Destroys or inhibits the growth of bacteria.

**Anticoagulant** A medication or natural compound that slows or prevents the formation of blood clots.

**Antiemetic:** Counteracts or relieves nausea or vomiting.

**Antifungal:** An agent that kills or inhibits fungi.

**Antimicrobial:** Aids the body in destroying or resisting pathogens. A general term encompassing antibiotics, antifungals, and antivirals.

**Antioxidant:** A substance that

inhibits oxidation and subsequent damage of important chemicals, enzymes, membranes, cells, and tissues in the body.

**Antiparasitic:** A herb that helps eliminate parasites.

**Antispasmodic:** Reduces muscle spasm and tension.

**Antitussive:** A herb that reduces the urge to cough.

**Antiviral:** An agent that inhibits the proliferation and viability of infectious viruses.

**Aperient:** A gentle stimulant to the digestion and a mild laxative.

**Aromatic:** A herb high in volatile oils, often with a fragrant aroma.

**Arthritis:** Inflammation of one or more joints, usually with pain, swelling and/or stiffness and sometimes with changes in the structure.

**ASBO:** Antisocial behaviour order - a kind of court order targeting certain behaviours such as drinking in public.

**Assimilation:** The process of absorbing or incorporating

substances into the body, usually nutrients or active constituents from plants.

**Arteriosclerosis:** The thickening, hardening, and loss of elasticity of the walls of arteries.

**Atherosclerosis:** The gradual build-up of plaque on artery and blood vessel walls that leads to blockage.

**Astringent:** An agent that constricts and binds a cell surface by coagulation of proteins. Herbs that are drying, drawing, and constricting to help create a barrier for healing.

**Biennial:** A plant that grows for two years before dying.

**Bile:** A bitter secretion of the liver, concentrated in the gallbladder that aids digestion, chiefly by saponifying (breaking down) fats.

**Bioflavonoids:** A class of botanical secondary metabolites shown to have a wide range of biological and pharmacological activities in humans and animals.

**Bitter:** An agent that increases tone and activity of gastric mucosa, improves the appetite, and stimulates gastric juices.

**Bitter Tonic:** A herb or blend of herbs that has a bitter taste and is used to stimulate and improve the digestive system.

**Border regime:** The many different institutions, people, systems and processes involved in trying to control migrants

**Bronchitis:** Inflammation of the mucous membranes on the bronchi, usually caused by an infection, sometimes by allergies or chemical irritations.

**Capitalism:** An economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit. Central characteristics of capitalism include capital accumulation, competitive markets, price systems, private property, property rights recognition, voluntary exchange, and wage labour.

**Carminative:** These herbs are often aromatic and help expel gas from the digestive system. This action can help ease bloating and gas related cramping.

**Catarrh:** An inflammation of any mucous membrane, often resulting in swelling or thick mucus.

**Cholagogue:** A herb which promotes secretion of bile flow from the gallbladder.

**Choleretic:** A herb that increases the production of bile from the liver.

**Cis:** Short for cisgender or cissexual - a person whose gender identity corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth. Trans author Julia Serano has defined cissexual as “*people who are not transsexual and who have only ever experienced their mental and physical sexes as being aligned*”

**Conjunctivitis:** Inflammation of the conjunctiva, either from environmental irritation, allergies, viral or bacterial infections.

**Compress:** A cloth soaked in herbal tea and applied to wounds, rashes, sore muscles, or sprains.

**Diaphoretic:** Promotes perspiration via dilation of vessels in the skin.

**Demulcent:** A mucilaginous herb that soothes irritated or inflamed tissue or mucous membranes.

**Digestive:** A herb that strengthens or supports good digestive function.

**Emollient:** A herb or substance applied externally to soften and soothe skin.

**Emotional labour:** A term with many uses and definitions that is evolving over time. Author Gemma Hartley describes emotional labour as emotion management and life management combined that is the unpaid, invisible work primarily women do to keep those around us comfortable and happy. It envelops many other terms associated with the types of care-based labour such as emotion work, the mental load, mental burden, domestic management, clerical labour, invisible labour. These types of emotional labour intersect, compound, and, ultimately, frustrate leading to exhaustion. In a grassroots organising context, it may involve emotionally supporting others through listening, constant tiring attention to group dynamics and feelings, and an uneven distribution of labour in terms of organising practical details especially around aspects such as cooking, cleaning and project maintenance.

**Emmenagogue:** A plant that stimulates menstruation.

**Enzymes:** Any of various organic proteins secreted by the body that act as catalysts in inducing chemical

changes in other substances, particularly in digestion. Enzymes are the communication particles of the body. They carry and sometimes are the nutrients travelling from one gland or organ to another. They allow intercommunications and facilitate absorption.

**Enteritis:** Inflammation of the small intestines.

**Essential Oil:** An extremely light and volatile concentrated oil extracted from aromatic plants. These oils are used in aromatherapy and produced by distillation or chemical or solvent extraction.

**Expectorant:** A substance that stimulates the outflow of mucus from the lungs and bronchial mucosa.

**Febrifuge:** A herb that reduces fever.

**Galactagogue:** A herb that increases the flow of breast milk.

**Haemagogue:** An agent that promotes the flow of blood.

**Haemostatic:** Controls the flow or stops the flow of blood.

**Hegemony:** The social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence



exerted by a dominant group.

**Hepatic:** A herb that affects, heals, supports or repairs the liver.

**Herbaceous:** A type of plant with little or no woody tissue, usually living a single season.

**HPA:** Is the hypothalamus pituitary adrenal axis. This controls the body's physiological reactions to stress, moods and emotions. The hypothalamus is a gland in the brain that functions as a 'thermostat' monitoring our environments, it communicates with the pituitary gland which secretes hormones into the bloodstream. The adrenal glands sit on top of the kidneys which secrete hormones and neurotransmitters to regulate the body's stress response.

**Immunity:** The ability to resist infection and to heal. The process may involve acquired immunity, (the ability to learn and remember a specific infectious agent), or innate immunity (the genetically programmed system of responses that attack, digest, remove, and initiate inflammation and tissue healing).

**Individualism:** A political worldview that values individual freedoms before collective interests.

**Licence:** Licence conditions are the set of rules individuals must follow if they are released from prison but still have a part of their sentence to serve in the community.

**Materia Medica:** A body of collected knowledge and description of remedies suggested in herbal therapy.

**Medical industrial complex:** A network of interactions between pharmaceutical corporations, health care personnel, and medical conglomerates to supply health care-related products and services for a profit.

**Microbe:** A minute living organism, for example, pathogenic bacteria.

**Military industrial complex:** The relationship between a country's military and the defence industry that supplies it, seen together as a vested interest which influences public policy.

**Neoliberalism:** A model of free market capitalism that favours greatly reduced government spending, deregulation, globalisation, free trade, and privatisation.

**Nervine:** A herb that affects the nervous system: may be stimulating, sedating, or relaxing.

**NPIC:** The not for profit industrial complex describes the way non-profit organisations, governments, and businesses are related. The group INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence published the book *The Revolution will not be Funded* in 2017 exploring the NPIC and how political goals are often co-opted to serve government, grantmaking and foundation interests. The NPIC shifts focus to building non-governmental organisations instead of building movements.

**Parasympathetic:** A division of the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system that controls normal digestive, reproductive, cardiopulmonary, and vascular functions and stimulates most secretions.

**Perennial:** A plant that lives for more than two years. The aerial parts of perennial plants may die back at the end of the growing season but the roots often endure for many years.

**Phlegm:** Mucus in the throat or bronchi.

**Phytochemical:** A biologically

active substance in plants that is responsible for giving them their characteristics, such as colour, flavour, and natural disease resistance. Our everyday food contains millions of phytochemicals including bioflavonoids, carotenoids, indoles, isoflavones, phytoestrogens, phytosterols, phenols, etc.

**Phytoestrogen:** Natural oestrogens that occur in plants.

**Poultice:** A mass of fresh, ground-up herbs applied wet to an area of the body in order to encourage healing.

**PTSD:** Post traumatic stress disorder. PTSD is classified as a mental and behavioural disorder that develops from experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. There are more expansive definitions of PTSD including complex PTSD that describes the more complex reactions that are typical of individuals exposed to chronic trauma, such as childhood abuse or neglect. PTSD is explored in depth in my *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course that explores and challenges mainstream definitions of trauma.

**Propagation:** The process of creating a new plant from a part of a mother plant. New plants can be

rooted from stems or shoots, or by dividing root masses.

**Restorative:** A herb that restores balance and strength to the body and its systems.

**Rhizome:** An underground stem from which roots and shoots grow. The rhizomes of ginger, turmeric, and valerian are all collected for medicine.

**Rubefacient:** Stimulates blood flow to the skin, causing local redness and affecting healing in the organs that lie beneath because of increased circulation.

**Sialogogue:** A herb that increases the secretion of saliva.

**Simple:** A single herb used on its own in medicine.

**Sinusitis:** Inflammation of the sinuses, with causes ranging from dust to hay fever. Obstinate cases can be caused by chronic sinus infections or the continued exposure to allergens from food, pets or environmental irritants.

**Systemic:** Affecting or concerned with the entire body.

**Tannin:** An active plant

constituent that combines with proteins; term originally derived from tannum (oak bark) used for tanning leather; astringent.

**Tincture:** A concentrated herbal extract made by soaking ground up herbs in solvents like alcohol or vinegar and then pressing the liquid out.

**Tonic:** Slowly restores and strengthens the tone of the body, organ, or system; it stimulates nutrition and enhances or normalises physiological function.

**Trauma:** The word 'trauma' has its roots in the Greek word for wound or damage. One definition of trauma is a distressing, disturbing or wounding experience or injury experienced in many ways over a lifetime.

**Urinary Tract:** The kidneys and the lower urinary tract, which includes the ureters, bladder, and urethra.

**Vasodilator:** A herb's action or process in the body that opens or widens the blood vessels.

**Vulnerary:** Heals wounds.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A huge thanks to my Mum for helping take care of me through my pregnancy, including months of horrendous vomiting and nausea. A massive thank you to Amani for our friendship and for all your beautiful illustrations that bring the book to life. Endless love and appreciation to all my friends and comrades (you know who you are!). This includes people I work with in my various crews, including the Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais team. I can never be grateful enough to those of you resisting the prison system every day by staying alive, who still somehow have the energy to love me and be incredible friends. Speaking to you Sam and Kev! And for Taylor, I still feel your love and support despite you being finally free of the prison system and of this material world. Endless gratitude to all the contributors, your patience and offerings of herbal solidarity! I want to thank everyone who has trusted me as a herbalist to support them on their journey recovering from state violence and/or trauma. Thank you to Active Distribution and all the DIY distros getting this book out there. Thanks to Tom for proofreading. And finally, thank you to the plants - for your inspiration, medicine and accompaniment through this wild life.

## ABOUT NICOLE ROSE



Nicole Rose (she/her) is an anarchist and herbalist based in the West Country of England who has been active in struggles for human, animal and earth liberation for over two decades. Her lineages are English, Welsh and Irish. Nicole did a three and a half year prison sentence aged 21 amidst a decade of state repression against the campaign to close down Europe's largest animal testing company.

She's been supporting loved ones in prison for twenty years and founded the Solidarity Apothecary, a project supplying free plant medicines to people experiencing and recovering from state violence and repression. Nicole is also the author of *The Prisoner's Herbal*, *Overcoming Burnout* and the *Medicinal Herb Colouring Book* and hosts the *Frontline Herbalism Podcast*.

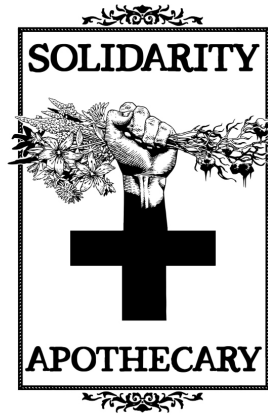
## ABOUT THE SOLIDARITY APOTHECARY

The Solidarity Apothecary is a grassroots herbalism project materially supporting revolutionary struggles and communities with plant medicines. Its goal is to strengthen collective autonomy, self-defence and resilience to climate change, capitalism and state violence.

The main focus of the Solidarity Apothecary is making and distributing plant medicines to people experiencing state violence and repression. This includes people being arrested, on trial, imprisoned, detained or recovering from these experiences, as well as prisoner families, frontline organisers and more. Herbal Solidarity can be in the form of care packages, one-to-one support or as part of the mobile clinic. One to one support is offered via the Solidarity Apothecary Clinic, a sliding scale offering of in-depth personalised herbal support.

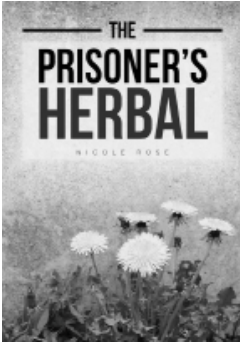
The project offers popular education about herbal medicines via books, workshops and courses, as well as the *Frontline Herbalism Podcast*. The Solidarity Apothecary's main course offering is the *Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress* course. There are eight comprehensive modules exploring how trauma shapes the body and how we can reclaim and reshape it. Learners develop an in-depth knowledge of plants, herbalism and nervous system physiology, grounded in an anti-oppressive analysis. There are 60 video lessons in total including 32 in-depth plant profiles about herbs with an affinity for the nervous system. The Solidarity Apothecary also offers courses in medicine making online and in-person, as well as free workshops connecting herbalism, state violence, anti-repression work and incarceration.

The Solidarity Apothecary distributes copies of *The Prisoner's Herbal* book to people in prison worldwide.



[www.solidarityapothecary.org](http://www.solidarityapothecary.org) | IG: @solidarity.apothecary

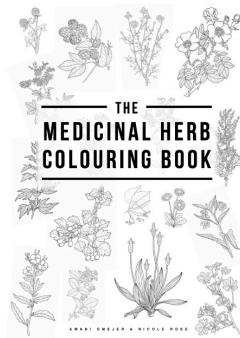
## OTHER BOOKS



Prisoners all over the world commonly experience medical neglect and a dehumanising separation from wild places. However, weeds come up through the concrete cracks. This book contains detailed profiles of ten plants that are commonly found in prison yards. It is based on my use of plants during my own 3.5-year prison sentence, with suggestions on how to prepare medicines in prison with limited resources.



Organising with others for human, animal and earth liberation can be one of the most empowering experiences alive. Yet frontline resistance comes with risks to our physical and emotional health that can lead many people to burn out and abandon social movements altogether. This book is about overcoming burnout, linking the author's journey of recovery and a call for models of mutual aid and collective care.



This book shares 50 beautiful illustrations of common plants and descriptions of their medicinal properties. Whatever your age and whatever your experience with herbal medicine, this book offers you a stunning collection of 50 illustrations to lose yourself in. From Betony to Yarrow, these plants are all around us. Illustrations by Amani Omejer.

<https://solidarityapothecary.org/store/>

## THE FRONTLINE HERBALISM PODCAST



The Frontline Herbalism Podcast is a show for people who love plants and care about liberation. Plant knowledge, medicine making tips, interviews and advice on how to skill up to strengthen collective autonomy, self-defence and resilience to climate change, capitalism and state violence. Learning and inspiration from grassroots healthcare initiatives and frontline herbal projects worldwide.

Find on all the main podcast players and listen to all the episodes at:

<https://solidarityapothecary.org/podcast/>



## ABOUT KES OTTER LIEFFE



Kes Otter Liefte is a writer and ecologist currently based near Berlin. She is the author of four speculative fiction novels, including the Margins trilogy, several short stories, and a colouring book series on queer ecology.

Kes writes from a working-class, chronically ill, transfeminine perspective.

Kes has been involved in grassroots community struggles for over twenty years. Her work focuses on the intersections of class, queerness and environmental struggles and creating radical alternatives to the oppressions of capitalism.

Kes had the honour of editing this book and is available for similar projects. Check out her work at: [www.otterliefte.com](http://www.otterliefte.com)

## INDEX

### Plant Index

- Ajwain 305  
Alfalfa 125  
Aloe Vera 155, 314, 315  
Anemone 144  
Angelica 124  
Ashwagandha 41, 158, 228, 251, 252  
Astragalus 124, 127, 171, 228  
Arnica 95, 144, 153, 154, 306, 337  
Autumn Crocus 326, 327  
Baikal Skullcap 199, 215, 314, 315, 387  
Basil 149  
Bay leaf 149, 300  
Belladonna 326, 327, 329  
Benzoin 102  
Betony 41, 85, 99, 214, 215, 217, 361 - 363  
Black Pepper 100, 107, 129, 168, 171, 189, 300  
Burdock 57, 124, 129, 149, 352, 406  
Broom 328  
Cajuput 102  
Calendula 124, 128, 307 - 310, 312, 319, 407  
California Poppy 40, 241  
Camphor 301  
Catnip 39, 128, 231, 232, 322  
Cardamom 107, 108, 123, 126, 127, 245, 305  
Cayenne 100, 118, 168, 171  
Chili 100, 118, 168, 304  
Cedar 55, 56, 57, 77  
Cinnamon 107, 108, 112, 129, 152, 164, 171, 299, 305, 351, 410  
Chamomile 39, 57, 74, 86, 87, 98, 101, 107, 116, 128, 144, 154, 157, 169, 189, 213, 214, 225, 229, 231, 232, 241, 250, 251, 313, 314, 319, 322, 336, 338, 353, 364 - 367, 374, 411  
Chaparral 312  
Chickweed 312, 313, 314  
Chicory 124, 129, 326  
Clary Sage 102  
Cleavers 303, 310  
Clove 102, 107, 108, 149, 307, 308, 352  
Codonopsis 124, 127  
Comfrey 95, 111, 153, 154, 306, 337, 357  
Coriander 123  
Cranesbill 307  
Daisy 306  
Dandelion 57, 124, 126, 129, 148, 149, 189, 228, 229, 233, 336, 419  
Datura 327  
Dong Quai 124, 127  
Echinacea 151, 152, 227, 307, 308, 314, 337

Elderberry 41, 77, 98, 100, 153, 164,  
 167, 170, 171, 227, 230, 302, 303,  
 314, 337  
 Elderflowers 101, 303  
 Elecampane 151, 299, 314  
 Ephedra 309  
 Eucalyptus 102, 149, 301, 314  
 Evening Primrose 41  
 Fennel 123, 125, 127, 164, 299, 305,  
 308, 314, 322, 366  
 Feverfew 39  
 Foxglove 326, 327  
 Garlic 100, 117, 118, 150, 152, 167,  
 170, 302, 303, 317, 337, 406  
 Gentian 126, 129  
 Geranium 125  
 Ginger 100, 107, 108, 117, 118, 123,  
 125, 127, 129, 144, 152, 165, 168,  
 169, 170, 302, 303, 305, 317, 337,  
 406  
 Grindelia 151  
 Ground Ivy 314  
 Hawthorn 43, 48, 74, 75, 84, 85, 87,  
 99, 101, 104, 105, 10, 114, 127, 165,  
 169, 229, 230, 241, 242, 244, 245,  
 246, 303, 336, 368 - 371, 409  
 Henbane 326, 327  
 Herb Bennet 307, 322  
 Honeysuckle 314, 352, 353  
 Hops 40, 217  
 Horseradish 100, 168, 170, 171, 305  
 Horse chestnuts 328  
 Hyssop 45, 303  
 Ivy 300, 304, 310  
 Jasmine 102, 352  
 Juniper 77, 102  
 Lavender 39, 40, 41, 42, 74, 76, 77,  
 95, 101, 102, 106, 107, 108, 110,  
 143, 144, 148, 149, 155, 156, 157,  
 168, 169, 213, 214, 230, 241, 300,  
 306, 310, 312, 315, 319, 337, 347 -  
 350, 354, 372 - 375  
 Lemon 100, 102, 147, 167, 317  
 Lemon Balm 39, 74, 80, 81, 85, 86,  
 87, 100, 101, 105, 106, 152, 157,  
 165, 168, 169, 229, 230, 231, 241,  
 317, 322, 336  
 Licorice 41, 124, 127, 128, 144, 150,  
 158, 227, 230, 305, 307, 310, 311  
 Linden/Lime Flowers 43, 44, 244,  
 251, 322, 336  
 Lobelia 144, 175, 314  
 Marshmallow 124, 128, 150, 164,  
 298, 299, 310, 311, 315, 316, 318,  
 326  
 Meadowsweet 124, 148, 229  
 Milk Thistle 125, 148, 229  
 Milky Oats 41, 75, 85, 87, 144, 157,  
 229, 241, 250, 322, 380 - 382  
 Mimosa 144, 245, 322  
 Motherwort 43, 44, 75, 79, 80, 86,  
 229, 241, 322, 357  
 Moringa 125, 129  
 Mugwort 40, 77, 160, 161, 217, 246,  
 354  
 Mullein 110, 112, 150, 413  
 Mustard 152, 305  
 Myrrh 57, 307, 308, 309, 315  
 Nettle 98, 125, 129, 156, 157, 246,  
 251, 309, 314, 328, 336, 353, 412,

419  
 Nutmeg 123  
 Oak 307, 308  
 Oat 87, 107, 148, 380 - 382  
 Oat Straw 114, 125, 129, 250, 336, 380 - 382, 412  
 Onion 100, 151, 152, 167, 170, 171  
 Oregano 123, 149, 152, 171, 304, 305  
 Parsley 304, 305, 352  
 Passionflower 40, 57, 75, 76, 81, 82, 128, 157, 216, 230, 241, 322  
 Patchouli 102  
 Peat Moss 326  
 Pennyroyal 326  
 Pineappleweed 114, 364  
 Peppermint 102, 116, 128, 144, 149, 165, 168, 307, 308, 310, 313, 314  
 Plantain 111, 124, 128, 151, 314, 416  
 Pokeweed 326  
 Poppies 328  
 Quinine 326  
 Red Raspberry Leaf 125, 128, 291, 307, 336  
 Red Clover 125, 129, 159  
 Reishi 112, 124, 125, 158  
 Rose 43, 48, 60, 61, 75, 77, 85, 87, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106, 111, 114, 144, 158, 165, 168, 169, 174, 175, 213, 214, 215, 218, 225, 226, 229, 230, 231, 234, 241, 245, 299, 309, 310, 311, 319, 322, 336, 409  
 Rosehips 167, 171, 328, 329, 384, 385  
 Rosemary 45, 46, 77, 100, 123, 149, 152, 168, 171, 242, 246, 305  
 Sage 45, 57, 76, 77, 110, 123, 304, 305, 307, 308  
 Seaweeds 115, 125, 129, 148  
 Schisandra 41, 125, 129, 148  
 Shiitake 148  
 Skullcap 40, 41, 42, 75, 76, 82, 87, 101, 106, 144, 157, 169, 199, 200, 215, 216, 230, 234, 235, 241, 322, 336, 387 - 390  
 Slippery Elm 124  
 Star Anise 305  
 St John's Wort 41, 95, 99, 111, 153, 154, 243, 244, 306, 337, 391 - 394, 409  
 Strawberry Leaf 125  
 Tarragon 125  
 Tea Tree 125  
 Thyme 45, 76, 123, 149, 151, 152, 165, 171, 300, 302, 305, 312, 314, 353  
 Thuja 312  
 Tormentil 307  
 Tulsi 41, 158, 252, 303, 322  
 Turmeric 100, 123, 129, 144, 152, 165, 168, 171, 191, 302, 303, 305, 352, 353  
 Valerian 40, 57, 76, 82, 83, 86, 217, 241, 322, 327, 329, 336, 338, 341, 377  
 Vanilla 107, 108  
 Vervain 41, 85, 99, 214, 215, 229, 322, 395, 396, 397  
 Wild Cherry 151  
 Wild Lettuce 40, 41, 76, 241

Wintergreen 102, 306, 337  
 Witch hazel 308, 309  
 Wormwood 175  
 Yarrow 43, 125, 128, 152, 159, 164,  
 165, 168, 175, 303, 325, 357  
 Yellow Dock 124, 126, 129  
 Yerba Santa 151

## Other Index

Abandonment 28, 194  
 Abolition 110, 132 - 134, 178 - 186,  
 192 - 194, 258, 269, 270, 399  
 Abuse 29, 54, 122, 130, 133, 134,  
 183, 196, 197, 220, 240, 265, 266  
 Acne 161, 309, 313, 366, 385  
 Alcohol 31, 40, 54, 123, 125, 148,  
 183  
 Allergies 19, 116, 121, 122, 125, 149,  
 157, 199, 227, 244, 274, 314, 322,  
 392  
 Anarchist 22, 24, 25, 6, 88, 94, 109,  
 182, 185, 205, 237, 330, 333, 342  
 Ancestors 2, 114, 191, 247, 352  
 Anger 30, 37, 47, 73, 104 - 106, 124,  
 157, 158, 192, 206, 208, 221, 233 -  
 235, 241, 352  
 Animal liberation 32, 33, 66 - 71, 166  
 - 169, 238  
 Anti-repression 65 - 70, 88, 102, 345  
 Antibacterial 100, 150, 155, 161,  
 167, 168, 170, 309, 313, 364, 372,  
 383, 385  
 Antifungal 161, 169, 170, 374, 385  
 Antimicrobials 46, 149, 152, 154,  
 165, 170, 227, 229, 244, 300, 302,

304, 305, 312, 313, 315, 374, 383,  
 385, 387, 391, 393, 395, 396, 317,  
 417  
 Antispasmodics 38, 39, 46, 81, 123,  
 151, 361, 363, 364, 368, 372, 376,  
 377, 383, 385, 387, 388, 389, 398  
 Anxiety 29, 31, 36 - 39, 42 - 45, 52,  
 58, 62, 73, 75, 76, 78 - 87, 95, 99,  
 101, 102, 104 - 107, 119 - 121, 125,  
 144, 156 - 158, 168, 192, 211, 213,  
 216, 219, 224, 229, 231, 234, 248,  
 362, 366, 369, 373, 377, 383, 384,  
 388, 392  
 Apple Cider Vinegar 100, 151, 152,  
 164, 167, 170, 171, 302 - 304, 309,  
 310, 353, 412  
 Armenia 351 - 354  
 Aromatherapy 103, 123, 352, 374,  
 417  
 Aromatic inhalers 102  
 Arrests 66, 69, 72, 73, 75, 91, 94,  
 102, 111, 132, 133, 136, 143, 146,  
 178, 260 - 268, 292  
 Arthritis 121, 337, 363, 385, 309, 393  
 Asylum seekers 257 - 269, 321, 322  
 Autoimmunity 36, 119, 120, 121, 130  
 Badger Cull 106, 166 - 167  
 Bail 68, 88, 90, 91  
 Bites 144, 274, 280, 302, 309, 313,  
 352, 353, 363, 366, 374  
 Black Lives Matter 160, 172, 174,  
 296  
 Blood pressure 18, 34, 35, 38, 42, 45,  
 79, 80, 99, 104, 150, 158, 199, 214,  
 328, 369, 374, 377, 382, 396  
 Blood sugar 36, 43, 115, 116, 117,

197, 213, 229, 381  
 Border regime 254 - 269  
 Brainspotting 212  
 Breathing/Breathing techniques 55, 73, 84, 152, 157  
 Bruises 136, 153, 154, 275, 306  
 Burning herbs 73, 76, 77, 353, 354, 416  
 Burns 144, 153, 155, 352, 378  
 Calais 132, 255 - 264, 271 - 318  
 Cardiac nervines 43, 44, 84  
 Carminatives, see antispasmodics  
 Chemical weapons 142, 146, 157, 160  
 Chest pain 78, 151, 369  
 Chest rub 144, 164, 275, 300  
 Chronic Illness 25, 30, 42, 121, 198, 199, 200, 214, 39  
 Class 16, 23, 24, 25, 65, 69, 91, 92, 132, 180, 182, 203, 235, 330  
 Colonialism 14 - 17, 22, 25, 41, 44, 48, 133, 181, 182, 254, 255, 258, 329, 346, 348  
 Concentration 46, 228, 362, 377, 381  
 Cough 19, 149, 150, 151, 160, 164, 274, 298, 300, 307, 313  
 Cough Syrup 151, 164, 298, 313  
 Court 65, 68, 70, 88, 89, 90, 91 - 95, 97 - 101, 106  
 Covid-19 95, 162, 165, 172, 191, 198, 286, 345  
 Decongestant 46, 151, 372, 385  
 Decontamination 147, 160  
 Deportations 97, 183, 256, 266 - 269  
 Depression 45, 52, 105, 107, 119, 120, 125, 156, 157, 158, 243, 244, 249, 289, 373, 381  
 Detention 178, 181, 256  
 Diaphoretic 165, 168, 368, 372, 376, 395, 397  
 Digestion 34, 89, 95, 116, 119, 123 - 130, 156, 157, 168, 231, 310, 362, 365, 370, 389, 393  
 Direct Provision 321 - 322  
 Drying herbs 418, 421  
 EDMR 212  
 Electrolytes 142, 144, 147, 156  
 Emmenagogues 20, 80, 361, 364, 366, 375, 387, 395  
 Emotional labour 288 - 289  
 Energy 34, 40, 43, 44, 48, 115, 117, 124, 228, 249  
 Exhaustion 44, 83, 157 - 159, 214, 220, 228, 251, 362, 373, 377, 381, 389  
 Fever 153, 165, 326, 358, 378, 397  
 Fight or flight state 30, 34, 43, 45, 46, 52 - 55, 70, 73, 75, 79, 84, 157, 197, 199, 221, 249  
 Fire Cider Vinegar, see Apple Cider Vinegar  
 First Aid 137 - 142, 145, 316  
 Flashbacks 30, 32, 37, 70, 170  
 Flu 152, 153, 169  
 Freeze state 45, 53 - 55, 157, 196, 208, 243, 249, 290, 392  
 Fundraising 70, 94, 278, 342  
 Grief 30, 31, 44, 75, 84, 85, 99, 103, 104, 192, 234, 236 - 244, 245, 246, 369, 384, 392

Gut flora 43, 57, 117, 119, 120, 127, 149, 385  
 Gut lining 121, 123, 125, 128, 412  
 Handcuff injuries 153, 154  
 Harvesting 49, 328, 418 - 421  
 Headaches 19, 38, 46, 73, 83, 85, 102, 157, 214, 250, 251, 362, 373, 378, 389, 397  
 Heart palpitations 44, 74, 75, 80, 81, 83, 241, 251, 358, 377, 378, 384  
 Herbalism, PTSD and Traumatic Stress Course 13, 29, 33, 36, 47, 51, 69, 199, 202, 206, 210, 212, 228, 373, 404  
 HS2 163 - 165  
 Hunt sabotage 166 - 169  
 Hydrosol 60, 160 -162, 313  
 Hyperarousal 30, 35, 36, 44, 45, 191, 196, 202, 248, 396  
 Hypervigilance 23, 29, 30, 191, 193, 196, 201, 248  
 Hypnotic nervines 39 - 41, 76, 82, 105, 241  
 Hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis 42, 228  
 Immune system 42, 98, 101, 116, 117, 119, 120, 146, 152, 158, 170, 226 - 229, 304, 370, 385, 389, 396  
 Immune tonic 98, 152, 170, 302, 304  
 Imprisonment, see prison  
 Incarceration, see prison  
 Indigenous 14, 15, 17, 24, 56, 76, 109, 111, 122, 181, 182, 227, 325, 352, 398, 418  
 Inflammation 30, 35, 38, 43, 44, 105, 115, 120 - 125, 129, 148, 199, 214, 234, 244, 250, 352, 358, 365, 384, 393  
 Insomnia 37, 81, 102, 157, 158, 214, 216, 234, 388, 392  
 Ireland 14, 15, 114, 189, 321  
 Irritability 104, 157, 243, 359, 365, 369, 396  
 Israeli Occupation Forces 26, 99, 347, 348  
 J20 94, 102  
 Kurdish Freedom Movement 184, 284, 330, 331  
 Liver 34, 42, 124, 125, 148, 214, 228, 229, 233, 362, 363, 366, 370, 378, 389, 392, 393, 396  
 Medicine Making 404  
 Memory 32, 46, 157, 211, 212, 228, 362, 377, 381  
 Menstruation 85, 99, 146, 234, 363, 370, 390, 392, 396  
 Mexico 65, 109, 190, 191, 264, 265, 320  
 Migraine, see headaches  
 Migrants, see border regime  
 Migration, see border regime  
 Mobile Herbal Clinic Calais 271 - 318  
 Mouthwash 307, 397  
 Muscle Pain 30, 37, 43, 73, 74, 81, 89, 95, 104, 154, 156, 166, 169, 250, 306, 359, 389  
 Myelin Sheath 42, 53  
 Nausea 73, 78, 107, 351, 353  
 Nerve pain 43, 153, 215, 216, 275,

362, 388, 393  
 Nerve tonics 41 - 43, 46, 82, 87, 374, 392  
 Nervine relaxants 38, 39, 43, 46, 241  
 Neurotransmitters 38, 42, 57, 121, 373, 389  
 Nightmares 31, 37, 76, 211 - 217, 362, 388, 389, 392, 396  
 Not for profit industrial complex 71, 285  
 Nutrition 115 - 118, 125, 212, 225  
 Palestine 136, 262, 324, 347 - 349  
 Panic Attacks 78 - 87  
 Parasympathetic 33 - 36, 40, 41, 49, 52 - 57, 79, 84, 121, 200, 229, 365, 373, 377, 384, 388  
 Patriarchy 17, 23, 134, 180, 184, 236  
 Police 23, 29, 65 - 71, 72 - 75, 110, 132 - 134, 136, 145, 160, 185, 248, 261 - 274  
 Polyvagal Theory 49, 52 - 58, 240, 243  
 Poverty 23, 52, 112, 180, 184, 244, 329, 331  
 Premenstrual Tension, see menstruation  
 Prison 29, 32, 33, 40, 65 - 71, 88 - 96, 133, 178 - 186, 188 - 191, 194, 195 - 210, 218 - 222, 223 - 230, 231 - 233, 248, 265  
 Prison Industrial Complex, see prison  
 PTSD 29 - 33, 39, 45, 70, 89, 121, 192, 197, 202, 211, 212, 224  
 Queer 17, 23, 109, 172, 180, 184, 345, 400  
 Racism 17, 50, 65, 91, 133, 182, 252, 255, 258, 259, 263, 282, 293, 294, 341  
 Rage 30, 37, 44, 48, 73, 104, 192, 206, 221, 223 - 235, 240  
 Raids, Immigration 133, 256, 257, 267  
 Raids, Police 72 - 77  
 Refugees, see asylum seekers  
 Respiratory system 40, 149, 160, 164, 314, 363, 374  
 Rest 34 - 39, 48, 54, 79, 208  
 Restlessness 104, 105, 213, 216, 365, 369, 377, 384, 388  
 Ritual 49, 56, 76, 122, 246, 354  
 Scabies 268, 274, 309, 313  
 Sciatica, see nerve pain  
 Sedatives 40, 56, 76, 83, 214, 216, 241, 250, 251, 327  
 Shame 31, 89, 196, 197, 220, 238  
 Shock 72 - 77, 83, 159, 200, 229, 241  
 Shutdown 240, 243, 392  
 Sleep 31, 34, 39, 41, 42, 49, 74 - 76, 81 - 83, 101, 107, 156, 211 - 217, 230  
 Standing Rock 110, 171, 174  
 Stimulants 43 - 45, 57, 213, 225  
 Stimulating nervines 44, 46  
 Street medic, see first aid  
 Suicide 179, 182, 196, 204, 229, 266  
 Sympathetic 30, 33 - 43, 52, 53, 73, 74, 78 - 84, 104, 106, 196, 199, 211, 213 - 216, 225, 241, 365, 369, 377, 384, 388, 396  
 Taser injuries 153 - 156  
 Tear gas 110, 146, 160, 272



Tissue States 358  
 Trans 32, 109, 182, 184, 185, 197,  
 240, 345, 400  
 Translation 190, 290  
 Trauma releasing exercises 48, 206  
 Trials, see court  
 Triggers 30, 32, 33, 39, 53, 78, 79,  
 202, 212, 248  
 Trophorestorative 105, 215, 361,  
 362, 377, 380, 381, 383, 391  
 Ukraine 324, 325, 329, 333 - 346  
 Ukraine Herbal Solidarity 333 - 346  
 Uncertainty 88, 90, 205  
 Urinary Tract Infections 150, 374,  
 378, 393  
 Vagal tone 54, 57  
 Vagus nerve 52 - 55, 120, 121, 157  
 Vicarious trauma 90, 288  
 Vitamins & minerals 42, 82, 115 -  
 117, 119, 125, 153, 167, 212, 213,  
 227, 228, 244, 328, 368, 370, 380,  
 383, 388  
 Volatile oils 80, 81, 123, 250, 305,  
 361, 366, 377, 387, 391, 395  
 Vulnerary, see wound healing  
 Whiteness 14, 25, 346  
 Withdrawal 19, 83, 234, 366, 381,  
 388, 396  
 Wound healing 128, 224, 307, 315,  
 361, 363, 365, 366, 372, 391, 393,  
 Zapatistas 51, 330



# HERBALISM & STATE VIOLENCE

**State violence is a brutal reality for vast numbers of people.** It is an experience that is racialised, classed and gendered in its design and application. It intersects with nearly all forms of oppression. Plant medicines can be a tool for solidarity and resistance; they can practically support us to survive and they can help us recover from trauma. From herbal care for handcuff injuries to healing from incarceration, this book looks at examples from around the world of herbal solidarity in practice. Writing from her lived experience of incarceration, political organising and of running the Solidarity Apothecary, Nicole Rose explores some of the many connections between herbalism and struggles for liberation. Through recipes, remedies and stories from the herbal frontlines, she invites us to connect with our allies in struggle - the plants - to rest, to heal and to continue the fight.



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